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AUTHOR	Powell, Judith; Blackorby, Jose; Marsh, Julie; Finnegan, Kara; Anderson, Lee
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ABSTRACT

This report contains the interim findings of the Evaluation of Charter School Effectiveness. The study team collected and analyzed data on organizational arrangements and instructional activities implemented in charter schools to assess the impact of charter schools on teaching and learning. The study focused on four research questions: What is the educational performance of charter schools when compared with noncharter public schools? What are the characteristics of charter schools on a range of factors, including student body, educational programs and philosophy, and governance? What features of charter school educational programs are associated with particular educational outcomes for charter school students? and What practices of sponsoring districts and other educational administrative units help or hinder charter schools in implementing their educational programs as they intended? Although the study uncovered general characteristics common to charter schools, each charter school was found to be a unique educational organization. They varied widely on many variables, differing from noncharter public schools on key factors, but they also approached the state average on key student and teacher characteristics. Differences and similarities sometimes depended on the level of analysis. Six appendices include a profile of charter school survey respondents, survey instruments, interview study protocols, supplemental within-district comparison data, charter school law, and charter study advisory panel members. (Contains 19 figures, and 18 tables.) (RJM)

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December 11, 1997

EVALUATION OF CHARTER SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS

Prepared for:

Mr. Joel Schwartz, Project Director
Evaluation of Charter School Effectiveness
Office of the Legislative Analyst
925 L Street, Suite 1000
Sacramento, CA 95814

Submitted by:

Judith Powell
Jose Blackorby
Julie Marsh
Kara Finnegan
Lee Anderson

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Executive Summary

I. Study Overview and Design

This report contains the findings of the Evaluation of Charter School Effectiveness, an interim study commissioned by the Legislative Analyst's Office of the State of California in 1997. The study team at SRI International collected and analyzed data on the range of organizational arrangements and instructional activities implemented in charter schools, and sought to assess the impacts of charter schools on teaching and learning. Specifically, we addressed the following research questions:

- What is the educational performance of charter schools when compared with noncharter public schools?
- What are the characteristics of charter schools on a range of factors, including student body, educational programs and philosophy, finance, governance, contractual arrangements with teachers, independence from sponsoring district, etc.?
- What practices or features of charter school educational programs, finance, governance, etc., are associated with particular educational outcomes for charter school students?
- What practices of sponsoring districts, county offices of education, and/or the state department of education help or hinder charter schools in implementing their educational program as they intended?

Multiple data sources were employed in this evaluation: state databases; a telephone survey to all charter schools with charters granted before April 1, 1997;[1] a mail survey to all district and county sponsors of charter schools; site visits to 12 charter schools; and interviews with state-level administrators, policy-makers, policy analysts, and stakeholders. Data were collected from June to November 1997.

This executive summary highlights the study findings and recommendations but is not a substitute for the full report.

II. Charter School Characteristics

- **Differences between Charter and Noncharter Schools.** Charter schools had many distinct characteristics, several of which set them apart from most noncharter public schools in California. These differences are discussed in detail below. The basic differences included enrolling students who lived outside of sponsoring district boundaries, serving nontraditional grade-level groupings, and having, on average, smaller enrollments than noncharter public schools in the state.

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[1] Analyses in this report are based on the 98 responding charter schools that were operational at the time of the survey.

- **Similarities between Charter and Noncharter Schools.** Charter schools were similar to noncharter public schools in several key respects. For example, charter schools were located in all parts of the state in all types of communities. Charter schools provided about the same number of calendar days of instruction as all public schools in the state. Charter schools served all grade levels, and, like noncharter schools, a higher proportion served lower grade levels.

- **Possible Admission Criteria.** Most charter schools identified several factors that they considered as possible admission criteria in their schools. A space limitation or enrollment cap was often cited by charter schools as a factor that could prevent new students from being admitted to their particular schools. Less often, schools cited that an indication that a student and/or parent was not committed to a school's philosophy was a possible reason for not admitting students (it is possible that some parents may choose not to enroll their children after learning about a school's philosophy). Prior academic performance was rarely taken into account when admitting students.

- **Parent Involvement.** A high level of parent involvement was a defining feature of charter schools. A majority of charter schools required parents to commit to certain levels and types of parent participation, and most schools reported that parent participation was high. Three-quarters of charter schools surveyed required that a parent or adult sign a contract with the school when enrolling a child, and 40% required parents to participate in a minimum number of hours at school. Some schools faced community opposition in trying to institute parental involvement requirements.

- **Student Characteristics.** Overall, charter schools enrolled students with characteristics similar to the state average. For example, charter schools had an ethnic composition similar to that of all public schools in the state. Charter schools served percentages of low-income, special education, and limited English proficient (LEP) students similar to the state averages. Although charter schools served percentages of special education students comparable to those served by the state, special education was an area that was marked by uncertainty for many charter schools and sponsoring agencies.

- **Instructional Staff Characteristics.** Charter school instructional staff were similar to teachers statewide in several ways, although charter school teachers were more likely to be part-time. For example, overall, charter school teachers had an ethnic composition similar to that of teachers statewide. Starting teacher salaries in charter schools were consistent with the state average ($27,200 in charter schools vs. $25,500 in all public schools statewide).

- **Staff Certification.** On average, 71% of charter school instructional staff (full-time and part-time) had credentials. Full-time employees were more likely than part-time employees to have full state certification for the subjects they taught (83% vs. 49%).

- **Union Membership.** Nearly two-thirds of charter schools reported that some or all instructional staff were members of unions or other bargaining units.

- **Start-up vs. Conversion Schools.**[2] In general, start-up charter schools tended to be farther from the district or state norm on several dimensions than were conversion schools. Compared with conversion schools, start-up charter schools were smaller, more often enrolled students from a wide geographic area, and served more nontraditional grade ranges (e.g., grades 5-8). They were more likely to have instructional staff without union representation, and to have fewer traditional contract provisions for instructional staff (e.g., tenure). Start-ups were also less likely to serve special education and LEP students than were conversion schools. At the same time, however, they reported serving more low-achieving students than conversion schools.

- **Home-Based Study.** The 15 survey respondents that identified home-based study with the parent as primary instructor as the predominant—though not necessarily only—method of instruction for most students had a distinct profile.[3] These schools were most often located in small towns or rural areas, and were somewhat more likely to require parent contracts, more likely to enroll White students, and less likely to enroll LEP and special education students. The number of schools in this category and the total number of students they served were so small that their impact on overall charter statistics was negligible. However, because they represent a distinct variation on charter schools—one, moreover, that was not envisioned by the authors of the legislation—it is important to point out where they differed from charter schools as a whole.

III. Charter School Governance, Finance, and Accountability

- **Motivations for Charter School Petitions.** There was a wide variety of motivations for establishing charter schools in California. In the case study schools, those motivations included a desire for innovation, alternatives to existing programs, a particular curricular focus, or more parent participation in the education program. Most often among the case study sample, charter schools typically were initiated by some combination of administrators, teachers, and parents.

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[2] Start-up charter schools are newly created schools; that is, they were not previously connected to an existing school. Conversion schools are schools that converted from an existing public school, county or district program, or selected grade levels within a preexisting school or program. Survey respondents for this study consisted of 49 start-up and 49 conversion charter schools.

[3] Thirteen other schools identified home-based instruction as one of several instructional methods used, but indicated that most students were not taught this way.

- **Charter Sponsorship and the Charter-Granting Process.** Most charter schools in California reported district sponsorship (87%). Seven charter schools (7%) reported county sponsorship, and six schools (6%), which were located in the two existing charter districts, reported sponsorship by the California Department of Education. Although most schools were sponsored by districts, the relationships schools developed with their sponsors and the process schools underwent to become charter schools varied tremendously.

  Case study schools faced a range of responses to their charter petitions. In some cases, the sponsor and/or teachers' unions raised concerns about attracting students with diverse backgrounds and/or special needs, student assessment, teacher certification, and class size. The process was described by charter school staff as running the-range from thorough and fair to horrendous. Almost one-third of charter schools surveyed were required to revise their original charters. One-fourth were required to enter into written side agreements in order to get approval. Most schools thought these changes either helped or had no effect on their ability to implement their educational programs as intended. This is contrary to the assumption held by some charter school observers that any changes to petitions that were requested by the sponsoring agency would have a detrimental effect. Our school survey data indicate that this was not the case.

- **Charter Opposition.** Opposition to original charter petitions took various forms. In the case study sample, the goals and tactics of those who wanted to open charter schools were often seen (and sometimes intended) as open challenges to established interests within public school bureaucracies. In many cases, opponents to the charter were placated by changes to the petition prior to its approval. In other instances, opposition has continued or new opponents have surfaced during implementation of the charter. Despite the visibility of state and local union objections to the charter law and their misgivings about certain charter school practices, collective bargaining units took varying positions on charter schools in California. In general, local circumstances tended to determine local union opposition to charter petitions.

- **The School-Sponsor Relationship.** Relationships between charter schools and their sponsors were as varied as all other aspects of charter schools. They ranged from full dependence on the sponsoring agency to nearly complete independence. Some schools, in fact, were dependent to the point that the advantages of their charter status were obscured.

  Most charter schools did not or could not take advantage of all aspects of their "automatic waiver" from state and district regulations because their sponsoring districts or counties did not allow it, or because they made concessions to the union or the sponsor during charter negotiations. A smaller portion of charter schools did not associate charter status with certain freedoms because they were permitted by the district before the school had a charter, e.g., flexibility with the daily calendar or student assessment policy.

Many of the case study schools that had dependent relationships with their sponsors were satisfied with these close ties; many schools did not want to take on the responsibility of managing school finances. There were exceptions to these schools' satisfaction with the status quo, however. On the survey, more than half of the charter schools that did not have full control reported wanting more control over purchasing and staff hiring, discipline, and dismissal.

- **Charter School Finances.** In most charter schools, finances were at least partially controlled by the sponsor. According to the school survey, only 27% of schools had financial autonomy (i.e., they had full control over staff salaries and benefits and other budgetary expenses). Start-up charter schools were more likely to report financial autonomy than were conversions (85% vs. 15%).

  The most typical financial arrangement among the case study schools (most of which were financially dependent) was one in which schools were essentially funded as they would be if they were not charters. The financially independent schools in our sample had more variable financial arrangements with their sponsors. We found that the financial knowledge base of the school leader made a profound difference in the level of resources that an independent charter school received; school leaders with financial expertise were able to increase their schools' share of sponsor funds.

- School survey data showed that unfamiliarity with the financial side of schools was widespread among charter school directors. For example, 24% of the charter school directors surveyed did not know whether they were eligible for Title 1. Similarly, only a small proportion of school directors were able to report funds received in budgetary categories other than the state revenue limit.

  Financial Viability. According to officials in several sponsoring agencies, charter schools, as funded by law, do not have the financial resources to operate truly independently. Without help from the sponsor or an outside agency, the schools in the case study sample found that paying for facilities from revenue limit funds was a real challenge.

- **Liability.** Concerns about their own liability kept some sponsors from loosening their ties to charter schools. Several of our case study sponsors reported that their belief that they would be held liable for charter schools' financial or educational failure discouraged them from giving charter schools more freedom. In at least three districts in our case sample, this point of view was shaped by past negative experiences with charter schools. Sponsor liability remains a large gray area in charter legislation. Recommendations issued recently by the California Department of Education to the State Board of Education regarding the financial operation of charter schools are only "a starting point for discussion and debate on the precise nature of changes that need to be made in statute and regulation in order to address these difficult issues." Until clarification is made by the Legislature or the courts, the liability issue remains ambiguous.

- **Accountability.** For the most part, charter sponsors do not seem to hold charter schools to a higher standard of accountability for students' academic performance than they do noncharter schools. Although the schools we examined had measurable (to varying degrees) academic goals stated in their charters, most reported that they were not held accountable for achieving these goals by their sponsoring district or county. In contrast to the lack of accountability to sponsors for academic outcomes, most charter schools reported feeling accountable to parents in this regard.

  District and county sponsors were much more diligent about financial accountability than academic accountability. Sponsor and, in some cases, school staff were determined not to let their charter schools become headline stories of fiscal mismanagement.

- **Advantages of Charter Status.** Charter schools reported that their charters provided them with unique opportunities in several areas, ranging from personnel to finance. When school survey respondents were asked specifically what charter status allowed them to do that they could not have done under the traditional district management structure, charter school directors most frequently reported that they were able to allocate resources in a manner different from the district norm (87%).

  Respondents in four case study sites had difficulty identifying just what they gained from being a charter. In three cases, it was likely that the schools would have been able to implement their educational programs without being charters, given the reform orientation of their respective districts and the history of reform efforts within the schools prior to becoming charter entities. Charter status for some of these schools, however, insulated them—at least theoretically—from district policy changes that resulted from shifts in the political climate.

IV. Teaching and Learning in Charter Schools

- **Different Stages of Change.** It may be too early to accurately assess teaching practices within charter schools. Charter schools were at different stages of their experimentation and change processes. Some charter schools sought charter status to experiment with curriculum design, instructional programs, and professional development opportunities and succeeded in realizing this purpose. Others had been reforming these areas for years prior to becoming a charter school and used charter status to expand or continue these practices. Other charter schools articulated visions of new teaching techniques and curriculum in their charter petitions, but struggled to bring them to life within their classrooms. A few schools adhered to more traditional approaches to teaching, but argued that they had gained greater freedom to implement their educational program as they defined it.

- **The Role of Teachers.** The role of teachers in our case study sites varied, with most teachers taking on additional administrative or curricular responsibilities in their schools. At most of the schools we visited, teachers served on the school's governing body.

In some cases, teachers described positive effects of taking on more responsibility. They noted that they were more satisfied with these schools because they had more control over their own classrooms. In other cases, these role changes may have produced negative effects, such as increased hours and work, and a lack of clarity and confusion over exact roles and responsibilities.

- **Professional Development and Support.** Charter schools, for the most part, devoted a similar amount of time to professional development as other schools in California. The majority of case study sites reported providing more appropriate professional development opportunities because these were determined on a schoolwide or individualized basis rather than being designed by the district.

- **Teacher Evaluation.** Nearly all charter schools surveyed (89%) reported having annual performance evaluations for teachers. However, in our case study schools, teacher evaluation systems had not yet been fully implemented. Although school directors reported that they evaluated teachers, most seemed to do so informally.

- **Standards and Curriculum Frameworks.** In synch with the local, state, and national push toward standards-based reform, most case study charter schools recognized the importance of standards and high expectations for their students. Many of our case study schools reported that they followed the California Curriculum Frameworks as guides for curriculum and instruction. Several schools mentioned the use of district or county standards and curriculum guides. A small group of charter schools developed—or were in the process of developing—their own standards for some or all disciplines. A few schools articulated "grade-level expectancies." Many schools had developed or started to develop these standards documents before gaining charter status.

- **Instructional Delivery Methods.** The majority (87%) of charter schools responding to the survey reported using the more traditional, classroom-based approaches; 29% of charter schools also employed home-based learning with the parent as primary instructor, 22% used independent study with the teacher as primary instructor, 20% used work- and/or community-based learning, and 11% used distance learning. Almost half (48%) of charter schools reported using more than one instructional delivery method.

  Comparisons among charter schools reveal interesting patterns of instructional delivery. Start-up charter schools were more likely than conversion schools to use home-based learning as a primary method. Similarly, rural schools implemented home-based learning more frequently than schools in other locations. Large schools (enrollment of 600+) were most likely to have implemented distance learning as a primary instructional delivery method.

- **Classroom Practices.** In our observations of classrooms, we found the implementation of classroom practices supported by research on effective teaching for meaning and understanding (e.g., thematic and interdisciplinary instruction, team teaching, multi-age grouping, and technology use) to be uneven across—and even within—some case study schools. At some schools, these practices appeared to be consistently implemented schoolwide. At other schools, they seemed to be more isolated within a select number of classrooms. At still other schools, we heard talk of such practices but did not observe them in action.

V. Charter School Outcomes

- **Data Challenges.** When looking at three outcome areas of charter schools, the available data do not allow us to draw definitive conclusions about charter schools' performance, in part because it is too early in the reform process and in part because the available data are insufficient. However, we are able to address the usefulness of each outcome area in considering the success of California's charter school experiment. These three outcome areas are: (1) progress toward charter goals, (2) parental involvement and perspectives, and (3) student achievement.
- **Progress toward Charter Goals.** Assessing schools' progress toward meeting objectives specified in their charters is useful in that it takes into account the entire range of school goals, provides an opportunity for schools to show interim progress, and has local relevance. The limited data in this area indicated that schools approached this task of measuring progress toward goals quite differently, situating themselves along a continuum from concrete and quantitative to informal and process oriented. Several case study schools took a systematic approach, collecting and analyzing data. Others took a less formal approach to documentation. In all cases, schools found that their progress was mixed.
- **Parental Involvement and Perspectives.** The parent perspective in assessing charter schools is important since parents choose to send their children to charters. In a sense, parents "vote with their feet," so their decision to stay at a school can be interpreted as a sign of satisfaction. Available data on parents' opinions of charter schools indicated that they have achieved considerable success. Most schools reported having wait lists and plans for expansion in the coming year.
- **Student Achievement**. Measuring student achievement is made difficult by the diversity of assessment practices, philosophies, and available data among charter schools. Overall, schools surveyed considered the use of both traditional teacher-assigned grades and alternative assessments, such as portfolios and demonstrations, to be essential or important to their assessment of student progress. Standardized tests and local performance-based tests were also used, but were less frequently considered to be essential or important.

- **Illustrative Examples of Student Achievement.** Illustrative examples of student achievement at case study schools yielded mixed results. (Note that the following statements are intended to illustrate the complexities associated with various approaches to measuring achievement and are based on a very limited number of schools.) Some charter schools performed better than noncharter schools when compared with national averages, with all noncharter schools in their sponsoring districts, and with comparable noncharter schools within their districts. Others did not. Likewise, comparisons of charter schools' performance over time (within-school comparisons) yielded mixed results. It is important to realize that each of the above approaches to assessing progress has limitations. For example, comparisons with national averages can be misleading if the charter school population is very different from the national average on academically important issues, such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and disability.

VI. Recommendations

SRI makes the following recommendations based on data collected in this study. Most of these recommendations directly address issues that stem from ambiguities in the charter legislation. They concern serving students with special needs, the ethnic diversity of students, and liability. We highlight them here because they may have implications for reauthorization of the law.

- Address how charter schools must comply with special education regulations.
- Resolve the contradiction between ethnic balance in charter schools and neighborhood preference.
- Clarify legal and fiscal liability issues by including a definitive assignment of charter school responsibility in the Education Code.
- Provide more technical assistance to charter schools and sponsoring agencies on monitoring pupil learning, providing services to special populations, charter school finance and budgeting, and (for start-up schools) covering facilities expenses.

Recommendations for Further Research

- Future research should focus on fewer key research and policy questions.
- The Legislature should revise the legally mandated timetable for the next charter school study to allow for a longer interval for data collection, analysis, and reporting.

I. STUDY OVERVIEW AND DESIGN

Introduction

The California Legislature enacted the Charter Schools Act of 1992 to permit teachers, parents, students, and community members to establish schools that would be free from most state and district regulations (Senate Bill 1448). California was the second state to put this type of law into place—Minnesota enacted charter school legislation in 1991. Since California and Minnesota ventured into this charter school arena, many other states have followed their leads. As of September 1997, 29 states and the District of Columbia have existing charter school laws, though not all have schools in operation (Center for Education Reform, 1997).

Charter school laws in California and other states are based on the proposition that allowing schools autonomy from existing bureaucratic and regulatory constraints will enable them to adopt innovative and productive methods of operation, finance, and governance to support the improvement of teaching and learning.[1] In addition, proponents argue that charter schools will increase the number of educational options within the public school system. Most importantly, charter schools represent a shift from rule-based accountability to performance-based accountability. In exchange for freedom from bureaucratic and regulatory constraints, charter schools agree to be held accountable for student performance. As such, they offer California one model for fundamental reform of the state's system of schooling.

Charter school status is granted to schools once they have successfully completed the petition process with their district or county and, ultimately, the state. On approval, the California Department of Education provides each charter school with a number, in order of receipt, to ensure that the total number of charter schools within the state does not exceed the legislative cap of 100. Although the law states a cap of 100, the State Board of Education has been waiving the cap on a case-by-case basis since 1996.[2] Table I-1 illustrates the number of charters the state has granted each year since the California Legislature enacted this law.

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[1] For recent reports about charter schools in California and across the country, see Little Hoover Commission (1996); Corwin & Flaherty (1995); Finn, et al. (1996); RPP International and the University of Minnesota (1997).

[2] As part of the charter-granting process, districts may request the board to waive this cap (Education Code, Section 47602) by using a Standard Basic Waiver Request Form.

Table I-1
NUMBER OF CHARTER SCHOOLS APPROVED EACH YEAR

Year Approved[3]	Number of Schools
1993	42
1994	28
1995	36
1996	15
1997	3
TOTAL	124

General Approach

The Legislative Analyst's Office of the State of California (LAO) contracted with SRI International to conduct this interim Evaluation of Charter School Effectivness. This study was required by law to provide the Legislature with information prior to a more in-depth evaluation, which is legally mandated to be completed in January 1999. The purpose of SRI's 7-month interim study, conducted from May through December 1997, was to report preliminary findings to the Legislative Analyst's Office relating to the effectiveness of the charter school approach in California. This report will describe the range of organizational arrangements and instructional activities implemented in charter schools and seek to assess the impacts of charters on teaching and learning. It addresses a series of questions regarding charter schools that call for both a description of their chief characteristics and a sophisticated analysis of relationships among charter schools, their sponsoring agencies, their instructional programs, and student outcomes. Specifically, the report addresses the following research questions:

- What is the educational performance of charter schools when compared with non-charter public schools?
- What are the characteristics of charter schools on a range of factors, including student body, educational programs and philosophy, finance, governance, contractual arrangements with teachers, independence from sponsoring district, etc.?
- What practices or features of charter school educational programs, finance, governance, etc., are associated with particular educational outcomes for charter school students?

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[3] The schools included in this table were approved before April 1, 1997. The three schools that were revoked are not included in this summary. This information was provided by the California Charter Schools Office of the California Department of Education.

- What practices of sponsoring districts, county offices of education, and/or the state department of education help or hinder charter schools in implementing their educational program as they intended?

To address these questions, we built the evaluation design on the research and analysis of previous reform efforts. Although charter school policies call for a radical shift from traditional rule-based practice, they are actually based on a series of ideas that have been evolving in educational reform for quite some time. Over the past 25 years, policy-makers, practitioners, and researchers have struggled to craft new approaches to the challenges facing American education, including the effective schools movement in the 1970s (Edmonds, 1975; Purkey & Smith, 1983), school-based decision-making and school restructuring in the 1980s (David & Shields, 1991; Elmore, 1990; Newmann, 1991), and parental choice and the provision of greater autonomy in return for increased accountability in the 1990s (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Running through this stream of reforms is a common, if evolving, set of ideas:

- The school is the key unit in which to promote improvements in teaching and learning for all students.
- Effective schools are organized not by past practice or external regulations, but by the goal of improving teaching and learning.
- The appropriate approach to reforming a school will vary across schools.
- Effective schools involve teachers, parents, and administrators in critical discussion and decision-making.
- Schools must be held accountable for student performance.

Charter schools are meant to possess these characteristics. They receive greater autonomy in return for greater accountability for student performance; they are designed to provide parents, teachers, and administrators with greater flexibility and authority to design programs that make sense for their children; and they are urged to build structures and schedules driven by student learning goals.

Study Design

This evaluation builds on the lessons we have learned from previous reform efforts. These lessons include the complexity and dynamism of the process of change, the significant amount of time required for fundamental shifts in a school and its classrooms, the overemphasis on process and underemphasis on student learning in many reform efforts, and the importance of understanding changes in student achievement in the context of an understanding of school- and classroom-level changes. On the basis of these lessons, our study employed multiple methods and triangulation of data collection from a variety of sources (described in the next part of this section) to address complex research questions. In addition, the evaluation minimized the burden on project participants by (1) concentrating data collection on high-priority evaluation questions; (2) having clear plans for how data would be analyzed and reported, thus eliminating the collection of extraneous data; and (3) maximizing the use of existing data sources to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort.

The study was designed to provide descriptive and analytical information regarding the status of charter schools in the state based on data gathered from five critical sources: (1) state databases, (2) a telephone survey to all charter schools, (3) a mail survey to all district and county sponsors of charter schools, (4) site visits to charter schools, and (5) state-level interviews. This report is based on a synthesis of these study elements. This multifaceted approach allowed the team to compile and analyze quantitative data, including student and teacher demographic data, as well as qualitative data, such as interviews of school staff and observations of classroom activities, in a short period of time. The following is a brief description of each data source.

State databases

To obtain basic descriptive details about charter schools, the study team used the California Department of Education's Web page and the Department's Charter Schools Office as resources. In addition, the study team accessed several statewide databases, including the California Department of Education's California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS), the Language Census, and the High School Performance Report, to compile data relating to school and student characteristics, as well as student performance data. We also downloaded data for noncharter schools, districts, and the state to allow us to make appropriate comparisons. Achievement data and behavioral indicators were compiled only for those schools that had been in place for at least 2 1/2 years.

Charter school survey

The SRI project team developed and piloted the school survey of the California Charter School Study in May 1997 (a copy of the Charter School Survey is located in Appendix B). The LAO and the LAO's Charter Study Advisory Panel reviewed the survey instrument and provided feedback to the team, which was incorporated into the final instrument. Letters of support from the LAO and the California Network of Educational Charters (CANEC) accompanied the survey to announce the evaluation and ask for charter school support. SRI staff members with prior interviewing experience conducted the phone surveys from June 3 through July 15, 1997. These staff members participated in training sessions led by the study team to prepare them for interviewing charter schools. Considering the complex topic area and detailed survey instrument, the training sessions proved to be critical to gathering reliable and valid data.

Of the 124 eligible charter schools statewide, 111 charter schools responded to the statewide charter school telephone survey (90% response rate).[4] The participating schools represented 30 counties and 80 districts across the state. Respondents were primarily school directors or coordinators but may have been other school staff, such as teachers who had leadership roles. The telephone surveys were approximately 45 minutes long, and included acquisition of student and teacher data, such as enrollment numbers and staff certification. These data were compiled by the respondent in advance, using a worksheet sent prior to the scheduled survey to lessen the amount of time required on the telephone. The survey was primarily closed-ended.

The descriptive information in this report relating to charter school characteristics, student demographics, teacher characteristics, finances, autonomy, instructional programs, assessment systems, and accountability was provided by the 98 respondents whose schools were in operation during the 1996-97 school year.[5] Unless otherwise specified, all the survey data refer to the 1996-97 school year.

District and county surveys

The study team developed two charter school sponsor surveys; one version was sent to 71 public school districts, and the other version was sent to 7 county offices of education (copies of these surveys are located in Appendix B). These districts and counties represented the entire population of charter school sponsors for the schools receiving approval as of April 1, 1997.[6] A first survey mailing occurred in August 1997, with a follow-up mailing in September. Phone calls were made to nonrespondents during October. Only 45 sponsor surveys (39 districts and 6 counties) were returned before the October 15, 1997, deadline. This represents a 58% response rate.

The district and county surveys were similar, with minor differences that enabled the team to ask more appropriate questions of these sponsor agencies. The sponsor surveys were designed both to triangulate charter school survey responses and to acquire district-level data for comparison purposes. The surveys consisted of questions relating to the district's or county's student and teacher characteristics, charter school policies, and school accountability and student assessment data (for both charter and noncharter schools). In addition, sponsors were asked open-ended questions about the impact of the charter schools in their district or county and any concerns they had about these schools. The survey included a school supplement for every school sponsored by the agency. The supplement focused on sponsorship relationships with the schools, including questions relating to school autonomy, the charter-granting process, contractual agreements with teachers, services provided by the sponsor, liability coverage, and charter renewal.

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[4] Schools were eligible to participate if their charters were granted before April 1, 1997. Three schools were automatically ineligible because their charters were revoked.

[5] Ten of the responding schools were not yet open, and two had suspended operation. One survey was eliminated from the sample because the school was represented by another survey—the school was in transition from one district to another and, at the point of the survey, had two charter numbers, representing the original and new schools.

[6] Two charter school districts did not receive this survey because the schools' sponsor is the California Department of Education.

Case studies

The case studies were included in this study design to allow us to describe in greater detail the features of charter schools uncovered in the surveys. Case studies also allowed for an examination of certain issues that could not be adequately addressed in the survey, such as instructional practices. Finally, cases allowed for an exploration of the reasons underlying broader patterns emerging from the data.

A sample of 11 charter schools was randomly selected from the population of 50 charter schools that had been in operation since September 1994.[7] We limited this sample selection to those schools that had been in operation for 2 1/2 years or longer to ensure that schools had been given the opportunity to implement their educational programs. One school declined to participate and was replaced by a school that was chosen to increase variation in geographic location. In addition, the team included in the case study sample the charter district that had been in operation since September 1994. This allowed the team to study in greater depth the issues faced by schools in districts sponsored by the California Department of Education. This initial sample was analyzed to ensure variation in the location, socioeconomic status, and financial independence of these charter schools. The sample was adjusted slightly to increase the geographic distribution of the sites. In addition, we performed statistical testing was to ensure that the ethnicity of the sample was representative of that of the entire pool of charter schools that had been in operation since September 1994.

The site visits were scheduled with school staff after an initial letter to schools and a phone conversation about the study. Team members conducted site visits during September and October in one- or two-person teams. The visits required approximately 1 to 2 days at the school site and a half day at the sponsoring agency. Staff from the Legislative Analyst's Office accompanied SRI staff on two visits, with the permission of the sites.

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[7] To lessen the burden on schools, sites participating in the U.S. Department of Education's charter school study conducted by RPP International were not included in the sample.

During case study visits, team members met with teachers, parents, and school administrators at the charter schools. When possible, the study team also conducted classroom observations. At the sponsoring agency, team members interviewed board members, union officials, business staff, superintendents, and other appropriate district administrators. Team members collected policy handbooks, student assessment data, and school accountability report cards during these visits. Table I-2 presents a list of case study schools. Echo Valley and Blue Sky are pseudonyms for schools that did not want to be identified.

Table I-2
CASE STUDY SCHOOLS

School	Grades	Enrollment 1996-97	Start-up/ Conversion	Location	School Type[8]	Sponsor Type
Charter Community School & Extended Day Program	K-12	720[9]	Conversion	Northern	C, H	County
Charter Oak School	5-8	49	Start-up	Central	C	District
Discovery School	K-6	820	Conversion	Southern	C	District
Eagle Summit Academy	6-12	725	Start-up	Southern	C, I	District
Fenton Avenue Charter	PreK-5	1,281	Conversion	Southern	C	District
Garfield Charter School	PreK-6	600	Conversion	Northern	C	District
Echo Valley Charter School	K-12	1,500	Start-up	Northern	C, H, I	District
International Studies Academy	9-12	520	Conversion	Northern	C	District
Blue Sky Charter School	K-5	615	Conversion	Southern	C	District
Nevada City School of the Arts	3-8	150	Start-up	Northern	C	District
Pioneer Union Elementary School District	K-8	1,200	Conversion	Central	C	State
Westwood Charter School	K-5	720	Conversion	Southern	C	District

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[8] "C" refers to classroom-based instruction. "I" refers to independent study with a teacher as primary instructor. "H" refers to home-based learning with the parent as primary instructor.

[9] Excludes extended day enrollment of 5,000.

State-level interviews

The study team conducted semistructured interviews with a range of state administrators, policy-makers, and policy analysts with responsibility for or knowledge of charter schools in California. Respondents included administrators in the California Department of Education and the Department of Finance, consultants to the education committees of the State Legislature, and representatives of nongovernmental bodies, such as a state teacher's union and a research institute. Specifically, the interviews addressed questions regarding the state policies that help or hinder charter schools, the impact of charter schools on the overall public school system, and changes in state policies or the charter school legislation that might improve the effectiveness of these schools.

Challenges

Charter schools in California vary greatly in terms of school size, demographics, educational purpose, and other key school characteristics. Their charters range from very detailed descriptions of educational programs, financial arrangements, and governance to more generic outlines of schools. As one would assume, these variations in charter petitions have resulted in even greater variations in charter school implementation.

In employing our multimethod design, we faced two formidable challenges, resulting from the relative newness and great variability across charter schools, and a lack of comprehensive and cohesive data on noncharter schools: (1) how to assess charters' impact on student performance, and (2) how to compare charters with noncharters, both in terms of basic descriptive data and in terms of student progress.

Tracking the impact of charter schools on student performance is, to say the least, difficult: most charters are relatively new; by definition, charters are quite varied in their approaches and educational goals; a variety of assessment instruments are used; and data are not always easily obtained. To address this challenge, we excluded from our analyses any school that has not had a charter for at least 2 1/2 years, reducing the sample to approximately 68 schools. We then examined four different data sources to determine student progress: state databases, the school telephone survey, the district/county mail survey, and case study data. Chapter VI of this report provides a detailed analysis of these student performance data.

Comparisons between charters and noncharters present other problems, most notably the lack of comparable data and the difficulty of finding appropriate comparisons for unconventional charter schools. Throughout this report, we make district- or countywide comparisons, as well as state comparisons, using data from the surveys and state databases. Although useful, these comparisons fail to take the context of each charter school into account. To address this challenge, we have used case study data to better illustrate the uniqueness of each charter school.

Organization of the Report

The next chapter of this report (Chapter II) describes in detail the characteristics of charter schools across the state to answer the question: how different are they from regular public schools? The chapter describes school and student characteristics, including school enrollment, grade levels served, student and staff ethnicity, and admission requirements. Chapter III describes motivations for petitioning to become a charter school, and the charter school granting and renewal processes. Also described in this chapter are ongoing relationships between charter schools and their sponsors, including discussions of autonomy, financial arrangements, and accountability. Chapter IV describes teaching and learning in charter schools—the types of curricular and organizational arrangements and the professional opportunities of teachers. Chapter V provides a discussion of the complexities of assessing charter school outcomes, and presents an analysis of available outcome-related data. Finally, Chapter VI summarizes the evaluation findings and presents policy and research recommendations.

II. CHARTER SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

This chapter presents a descriptive overview of charter schools in California, including such basic information as the number and types of charter schools, their locations, their admission policies, the students they serve, and the teachers they employ. Overall, charter schools had characteristics that were distinctly different from those of regular public schools. Taken as a whole, charter schools in California were smaller than regular public schools. Charter schools had criteria for admissions that frequently included parents' agreement with the school philosophy and commitment to involvement in the school program, but rarely took into account student achievement level. On the whole, charter schools served a population that was demographically similar to the student population statewide. Within-district comparisons, however, showed that in about 40% of charter schools students were more likely to be White, and in about 60% of charter schools students were less likely to be low-income than other students in their sponsoring districts.

Beyond these generalizations, each charter school was a unique educational experiment. Although the schools needed to be categorized for purposes of analysis, there was almost always a charter school that was the exception to the rule. With that fact in mind, this chapter describes the major characteristics of charter schools, offering comparisons to regular public schools when possible. Where relevant, this chapter highlights the differences between subsets of charter schools, most often between newly started charter schools and existing public schools that converted to charter school status.

Throughout the chapter, we draw on school survey, district and county survey, and case study data. These are supplemented with data from state databases, such as CBEDS. School survey data are based on 98 respondents, and all survey data refer to the 1996-97 school year unless otherwise noted.

General Characteristics of California Charter Schools

- **Charter schools were located in all parts of the state in all types of communities, with a few geographic areas of concentration.**

California charter schools were fairly evenly distributed across the state geographically, with concentrated numbers in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, San Diego, and Nevada Counties. On the basis of self-reports, charter schools in California were located in *small towns or communities* (33%), *urban fringe or suburban areas* (28%), *urban or central city areas* (19%), and *rural areas* (13%). Seven percent of the schools reported either that they were located in more than one of these locations or that they did not believe that any of these categories were appropriate.

A Closer Look[1]

The 15 survey respondents that identified home-based study with the parent as primary instructor as the predominant (though not necessarily only) method of instruction for most students[2] were concentrated in *small towns or communities* (47%) and *rural areas* (33%). A few reported that they were located in *urban or central city areas* (13%), and 7% reported either that they were located in more than one of these locations or that they did not believe that any of these categories were appropriate.

- **Half of California charter schools were newly created, and half were converted from existing public schools.**

The California charter school law allows charter developers to convert a public school to a charter school or to create a new school, generally referred to as a "start-up." In some cases, charter developers have converted programs run by either a district or a county, as well as grade levels within a public school. The types of charter school reported by respondents fell into equal proportions: 50% were newly created and 50% were converted.[3] The schools that reportedly converted to charter schools included 39 (40%) that were originally public schools and *converted entirely* to charter schools, 2 (2%) that were public school programs or grade levels (the original school may still be in operation as a noncharter entity), and 8 (8%) that were originally district or county programs.

- **Many charter schools enrolled students who lived outside of sponsoring district boundaries.**

In many cases, district-sponsored charter schools enrolled students who lived outside the boundaries of the sponsoring district. In fact, approximately 34% of the district-sponsored schools drew *25% or more of their students from other districts*—usually from more than four other districts but not statewide. In addition, 13% of these schools reported that *most or all of their students (76-100%)* lived outside the sponsoring district.

The proportion of students who lived within sponsoring-district boundaries was closely linked to whether the school was a conversion or start-up school. Approximately 93% of conversion schools reported that most or all of their students (76-100%) resided within district boundaries, compared with 39% of start-up schools. This pattern is consistent with the state law, which says that charter school admission should not be based on the place of residence of the pupil, although conversion schools must give preference to individuals who reside within the former attendance area of the school (Education Code Section 47605 [d]).

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[1] Where relevant, "*A Closer Look*" inserts appear throughout the chapter to provide the reader with an additional layer of survey analysis based on five comparison groups: home-based vs. other schools, district- vs. county-sponsored schools, urban vs. suburban vs. small town vs. rural schools, financially autonomous vs. financially dependent schools, and smaller vs. larger schools.

[2] Thirteen additional schools identified home-based instruction as an instructional method used, but indicated that most students were not taught this way. See Chapter IV for a discussion of instructional delivery methods in charter schools.

[3] Refer to the school survey in Appendix B, item A11, for an explanation of newly created (or "start-up") and conversion schools. Other studies—for example, those conducted by the Hudson Institute (Finn et al., 1996) and RPP International and the University of Minnesota (1997)—indicate slightly different numbers of conversion and start-up schools based on how they defined these categories.

- **On average, charter schools provided about the same number of calendar days of instruction as all public schools in the state.**

Charter schools, on average, provided 183 calendar days of instruction. In comparison, the average public school had approximately 175 instructional days.[4] However, charter schools reported a much wider range of instructional days (163 to 250) than noncharter schools (144 to 187). From our case studies, we learned that many charter schools have developed unique daily and weekly schedules. Therefore, these days may have a different meaning from instructional days in regular public schools. A higher proportion of charter schools than regular public schools operated on a year-round or modified year-round calendar—one-third of the schools, compared with only 17% of public schools in the state.[5]

A Closer Look

Less traditional calendars and schedules were most commonly found in schools reporting financial autonomy,[6] schools in urban settings, and large schools. Approximately 50% of financially autonomous charter schools operated on year-round calendars, compared with 23% of financially nonautonomous charter schools. Similarly, both geographic location and size seemed to correlate with whether or not the school operated on a year-round calendar: urban schools and large schools were the most likely to implement this type of schedule. Forty-seven percent of urban schools utilized a year-round calendar, compared with 30% of suburban, 22% of small-town, and 8% of rural schools. In addition, 44% of large schools operated year-round, compared with 31% of medium/large schools, 29% of medium/small, and 13% of small schools.[7]

- **Charter schools served all grade levels, often in nontraditional grade-level groupings.**

Charter schools served all grade levels from pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade. Like regular public schools, more charter schools served lower grades than upper grades. In contrast to regular public schools, half of charter schools served middle grades, compared with 24% of noncharter schools. Figure II-1[8] illustrates the differences in the percentage of charter schools serving each grade level.[9]

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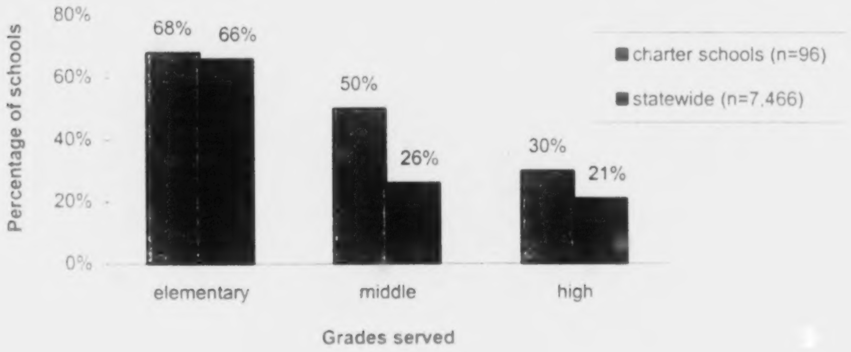
[4] State average supplied by School Services of California, Inc., Sacramento, CA.

[5] California Basic Educational Statistics (CBEDS) 1996-97, Public School Summary Statistics, Educational Demographics Unit, California Department of Education.

[6] "Financial autonomy" is derived from survey responses to question F1 on the Charter School Survey (Appendix B). Respondents who answered "full control" for "e. Staff salaries and benefits" and "f. Budgetary expenses other than salaries and benefits" were coded as financially autonomous.

[7] Throughout this report, large schools are defined as "600 or more students," medium/large schools are defined as "500-599 students," medium/small schools are defined as "100-499 students," and small schools are defined as "fewer than 100 students."

Figure II-1: Grade Levels Served by Charter Schools and All Public Schools



Consistent with national patterns, California charter schools often did not fit the traditional grade-level groupings—K-6, 6/7-8, and 9-12 (U.S. Department of Education, 1997). Charter schools, at times, served only portions of the grade-level groupings that are used in typical public schools; for example, a school may have served only 2nd through 6th grades. More frequently, however, charter schools served grades spanning two or more traditional grade-level groupings. For example, rather than serving only the standard elementary, middle, or high school levels, some schools served kindergarten through 12th grade. Figure II-2 shows the percentage of charter schools that served each grade-level combination, compared with the percentage of schools in the state.[10]

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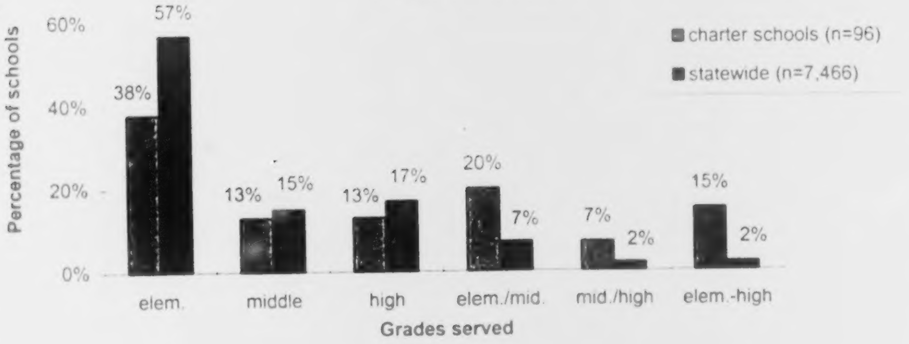
[8] Statewide figures are for 1994-95. The source of the state data is the Common Core of Data Survey (data prepared October 1996), U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), as reported in the *Digest of Education Statistics 1996*.

[9] These grade-level groupings are not mutually exclusive categories.

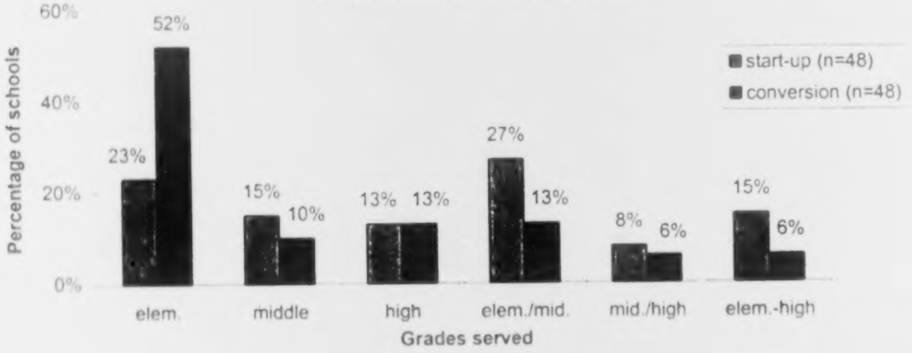
[10] These are mutually exclusive categories. If a school served grades falling within the grade-level range defining a category, it is classified in that category. For example, a grade 2-8 school would fall within the category Elementary/Middle, which is defined as K-8. The source of the state data is the Common Core of Data Survey (October 1996), U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), as reported in the *Digest of Education Statistics 1996*. Figures are for 1994-95. To arrive at the categories in Figure II-2, we combined several categories reported by NCES. We excluded the "other grade spans" categories for primary and secondary schools reported by NCES because it was not clear which categories these schools fit into (statewide n=355). We also excluded the "other combined schools" (e.g., alternative, special education, and ungraded schools) (statewide n=30).

Figure II-2: Grades Served by Charter Schools vs. Schools Statewide



Start-up schools were more likely than conversion schools to have nontraditional grade-level groupings. As shown in Figure II-3, start-up schools were more likely than conversion schools to serve grades K-8 (middle/high) (27% vs. 13%), and more likely to serve grades K-12 (elementary-high) (15% vs. 6%). Conversion schools were more likely than start-ups to serve grades K-6 (elementary) (52% vs. 23%).

Figure II-3: Grade Levels Served by Start-up vs. Conversion Charter Schools



- **On average, charter school enrollment was smaller than the average state enrollment.**

California charter schools came in a wide range of sizes. Enrollment varied from 5 students to 2,406 students, with an average enrollment of 434 students. This is much smaller than the average state enrollment of 767 (this figure includes charters and noncharters).[11] Figure II-4 shows differences between charter school and statewide school enrollment.[12] One upshot of the relatively small size of most charter schools and their vast range in student enrollments is that unweighted school-level data can yield different results when compared with student-level data. That is, if one averages data at the school level, a school with an enrollment of 50 carries the same weight as one with 1,000 students. As an example, the average LEP enrollment of the smaller school with 10% LEP students and the larger school with 50% LEP students would be 30%. If one took into account the number of students being served by each school, the average LEP enrollment would be much higher—48%. Although both school- and student-level analyses have their place, we have chosen, where possible, to report student-level data when describing key demographic characteristics (e.g., ethnicity, LEP, special education).

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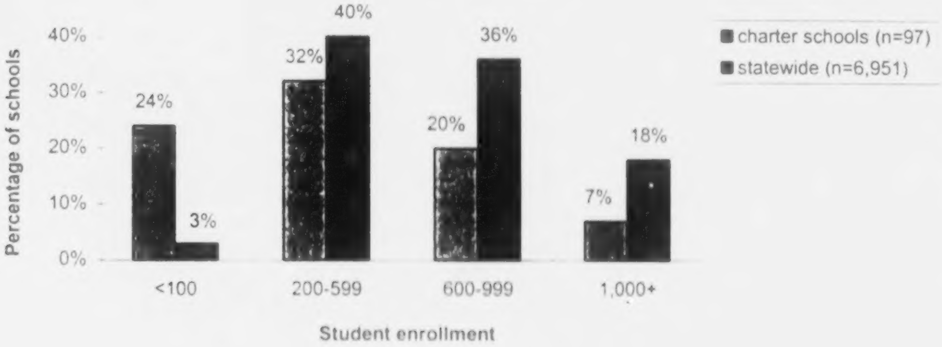
[11] State average comes from California Basic Educational Statistics (CBEDS) 1996-97, Public School Summary Statistics, Educational Demographics Unit, CDE (n=7,065). Excludes continuation, alternative, community day, special education, and juvenile hall schools (n=916).

Figure II-4: Student Enrollment at Charter Schools vs. Schools Statewide



Start-up schools tended to be smaller than conversion schools. Start-up schools had an average enrollment of approximately 244 students, compared with approximately 620 students for conversion schools. So, although start-ups were 50% of all charter schools in the state, they reached a much smaller proportion of the students. Altogether, start-ups enrolled 28% of all students in charter schools.

A Closer Look

The 15 survey respondents who identified home-based study with the parent as primary instructor as the predominant method of instruction for most students varied widely in size. They served from 5 to 1,756 students, with a mean enrollment of 309 students. In some cases, the larger schools were arranged as umbrella groups that provided support for large numbers of previously unaffiliated home schoolers.

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[12] State figures are for 1994-95. Special education, vocational, and other/alternative schools are excluded. The source is the Common Core of Data Survey (data prepared November 1997), U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

- **Charter schools identified several factors that they consider as *possible* admission criteria in their schools.**

Charter school developers were required to include information about admission requirements in their proposals only if they thought it was "applicable." Therefore, many schools did not describe the process in their charters but have had to develop and implement these admission criteria once faced with high demand for limited space. In fact, nearly two-thirds (63%) of the schools reported having more applicants than they could serve in 1996-97.

Although charter schools had not necessarily refused to admit students on the following grounds, when asked "Which of the following factors can prevent new students from being admitted to your school?" they identified a number of factors, most often a *space limitation* or *enrollment cap* (78%). Such caps could either be self-imposed, contained in a provision of the charter, or dictated by the size of facilities. *Student and/or parent not committed to school's philosophy* was cited by 44% of charter schools. As worded on the survey, this option could have been interpreted to include those parents and students who themselves selected not to attend a particular school because of philosophical differences. The factors that could prevent students from being admitted to charter schools are listed in Table II-1.

Table II-1

FACTORS THAT COULD PREVENT STUDENT ADMISSION

	Percentage of Schools	Number of Respondents
Space limitation or enrollment cap	78%	98
Student and/or parent not committed to school's philosophy	44%	97
Evidence that parent or adult cannot fulfill involvement requirements	32%	97
Student's special needs because the school does not provide services such as special education or primary language instruction	30%	93
Residency outside of school or district boundaries	29%	97
Student ethnicity; in other words, the school considers ethnicity in order to achieve racial diversity	17%	98
Student's prior academic performance	3%	97

Prior academic performance was rarely taken into account when admitting students, contrary to what many feared would be the case. On the other hand, 30% of charter schools reported that being *unable to meet student's special needs* could be a reason not to admit a student (see page II-15 for further discussion of special education students). Likewise, the percentage of schools that cited *evidence that parents cannot fulfill involvement requirements*

(32%) as a potential reason for not admitting a student indicates that some charter schools may have been exercising their right to be selective in their admission practices.

Twenty percent of charter schools reported that other factors could prevent students from being admitted to their schools. These factors included transportation (school does not provide), lack of student volition/motivation, lack of computer access (distance-learning program), student not identified as chemical dependence or at-risk for dependence (charter serves only this population), or expulsion from the sponsoring district or another district.

As illustrated in Table II-2, start-up schools were more likely than conversion schools to have admission requirements in several areas, most strikingly in relation to admission of students with special needs. On the other hand, only 12% of start-ups said they might take into account *residency outside of school or district boundaries*, compared with 46% of conversion schools. As mentioned earlier, this is consistent with charter law requirements that conversion schools must give preference to neighborhood students.

Table II-2

FACTORS THAT COULD PREVENT STUDENT ADMISSION: START-UP VS. CONVERSION SCHOOLS

	Percentage of Start-up Schools	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Conversion Schools	Number of Respondents
Space limitation or enrollment cap	76%	49	80%	49
Student and/or parent not committed to school's philosophy	50%	48	39%	49
Evidence that parent or adult cannot fulfill involvement requirements	37%	49	27%	48
Student's special needs because the school does not provide services such as special education or primary language instruction	44%	45	17%	48
Residency outside of school or district boundaries	12%	49	46%	48
Student ethnicity; in other words, the school considers ethnicity in order to achieve racial diversity	16%	49	18%	49
Student's prior academic performance	6%	48	0%	49

A Closer Look

A comparison of school locations uncovered differences in admission policies and practices. Urban charter schools were more likely to limit admission to those *students living within school or district boundaries*—44% of urban charter schools reported this as a possible admission factor, as opposed to 30% of suburban, 25% of small-town, and 23% of rural charter schools. Charter schools in small towns and rural locations were more likely to enforce parent requirements for admission—62% of rural charter schools and 41% of small-town charter schools reported that *evidence that parent/adult cannot fulfill requirements* was a factor that could prevent a student from being admitted, whereas only 21% of urban and 22% of suburban schools reported this as a factor.

Parent Involvement in Charter Schools

- **Charter schools reported high levels of parent participation.**

A high level of parent participation was a defining feature of charter schools. The vast majority of charter schools (88%) included parents on their governing bodies (see Chapter III for a discussion of charter school governance). In addition, charter schools reported that most parents participated in *parent-teacher conferences* (88%) and *ongoing monitoring of homework* (76%). Charter schools also reported that, on average, 40% of parents assumed *instructional roles*.

In most of the case study schools, there was a strong parent volunteer presence. Parents were busy assisting teachers in the classroom, photocopying classroom materials, organizing field trips, washing school uniforms, staffing the library, and working in many other capacities. Parents were also involved in large-scale fundraising in several schools, formal evaluation of the school's instructional program in at least one case, and the investigation of fiscal autonomy in another. Parents also had teaching roles in charter schools, especially those with home study and/or independent study programs.

Several schools reached out to parents by providing training for them. For example, one conversion school invited parents to virtually all on-site professional development events. Another stood out because of the comprehensiveness of its training opportunities for parents and community members. This school had a smaller parent education component prior to attaining charter status, but it has expanded it since then. Parents and other members of the community (usually relatives of students) could enroll in literacy, English, computer, and parenting classes, most of which had daytime and evening sessions to choose from. Child care was provided on-site in conjunction with these classes. Families were also invited on many of the school's field trips and weekend outings.

Although statewide data on parent involvement in noncharter schools are not available, there is anecdotal evidence that parent involvement is higher in some charter schools than in noncharter schools. In focus group interviews, parents frequently made favorable comparisons between their experiences at the charter school and other schools—public and private—where they felt less included. In most cases, they felt more welcome in the charter schools and felt that they had a voice in school decision-making.

- **A high number of charter schools required parents to commit to certain levels and types of parent participation.**

According to the school survey, most charter schools emphasized the importance of parent involvement in school activities and promoted participation with either voluntary or mandatory requirements. Perhaps the most interesting innovation in these schools was mandatory parent contracts. Three-quarters (75%) of charter schools required that a parent or adult *sign a contract* with the school when enrolling a child. In the case study schools, contracts typically covered parents' acceptance of school rules and parent involvement requirements, if there were any. Some charter schools also required parents or adults to *participate on committees/governance boards or attend parent meetings* (41%) or *participate in a minimum number of hours at school* (40%). Many schools did not have consequences if the parent or adult failed to fulfill these requirements; however, 23% of schools with parent involvement requirements reportedly had asked students to leave because of parents' failure to comply with these rules.

Start-up charter schools were more likely than conversion schools to require parent contracts—86% of start-ups, compared with 64% of conversions. Likewise, start-ups were more likely to require parents to participate a minimum number of hours at the school—46% of start-ups, compared with 34% of conversions. When the 15 home-based study schools are excluded from the analysis (home-based study schools make up 24% of the start-up schools), these comparisons are essentially unchanged: 87% of start-ups vs. 62% conversions required parent contracts, and 54% of start-ups vs. 32% of conversions required a minimum number of volunteer hours. One might expect that home school charters would be more likely to have parent contracts and requirements for volunteering, but that does not appear to be the case. Perhaps these schools do not consider parent involvement to be volunteer activity.

The parent involvement requirements in contracts were often quite precise. One case study school, for example, required that a parent volunteer at the school for 3 hours per week; another called for 4 hours per year. Two other schools each called for 5 hours per month. Two of these schools actually enforced provisions of the parent contract, leading, in one case, to a lawsuit against the school and, in the other, to a request that several families leave the school. Other schools have struggled with the question of how binding to make their contracts with parents.

In two case study schools, the parent contract idea was dropped in the face of community opposition. Some educators and advocates objected to mandatory parent involvement on the grounds that working, low-income, or single parents (many of whom were expected to reside outside the schools' historical attendance areas) might not be able to meet the terms of the contracts. Respondents in other charter schools argued that mandatory requirements were not discriminatory if they were flexible and included options for how a parent or guardian could fulfill requirements.

A Closer Look

Almost all small schools (96%) required parent contracts, and more than half of these schools (59%) required parents to participate in their schools for a minimum number of hours. Large and medium/large schools were less likely than medium/small and small schools to require parent contracts or minimum hours. Similarly, urban charter schools were less likely than schools in other locations to implement parent involvement contracts—58% of urban charter schools required parents to sign a contract with the school, compared with 85% of rural, 84% of small-town, and 74% of suburban charter schools.

Charter schools in rural locations were more likely than others to ask a student to leave when a parent or guardian did not fulfill the participation requirements—55% of rural charter schools reported taking these measures, as opposed to 24% of small-town, 17% of urban, and 14% of suburban charter schools.

The contrast between rural and urban schools is particularly striking regarding reports of parent involvement. Compared with urban schools, rural schools reported much higher levels of parent participation in instructional roles (53% rural vs. 22% urban), monitoring of student homework (93% rural vs. 68% urban), and parent-teacher conferences (97% rural vs. 83% urban). Part of this contrast may be accounted for by the 15 charter schools that are primarily home-based (i.e., have high parent involvement by definition); these schools made up 42% of all rural schools.

Student Characteristics

- **Overall, charter schools had a similar ethnic composition to all public schools in the state.**

Demographically, students in California charter schools were similar to students throughout the state. In total, approximately 48% of charter school students were White, followed in order by Hispanic (34%), Black (9%), Asian (5%), Filipino (3%), American Indian (2%), and Pacific Islander (0.5%). As illustrated in Table II-3, in all racial/ethnic categories, the difference between students in charter schools and students statewide was less than 9 percentage points.

Table II-3
RACIAL/ETHNIC STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS[13]

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage of Students[14] **Charter Schools** Total students: 37,436 (94 schools)	 **Statewide** Total students: 5,612,965
White, not of Hispanic origin	48%	40%
Black, not of Hispanic origin	9%	9%
Hispanic	34%	40%
Filipino	3%	2%
Asian	5%	8%
Pacific Islander	.5%	.6%
American Indian/Alaska Native	2%	.9%

A Closer Look

The ethnic composition of the schools that identified home-based study with the parent as primary instructor as the predominant method of instruction for most students was strikingly different from that of other charter schools. The vast majority of students at home-based charter schools were White (81%), compared with slightly fewer than half for all other charter schools (45%).[15] Twelve percent of students in home-based schools were Hispanic, compared with 36% in other charter schools.

Comparisons of individual charter schools with their sponsoring districts[16] provide a more valid description of school demographics in context. Such within-district comparisons of ethnic composition revealed a pattern similar to that found in the state comparison. Overall, most charter schools mirrored the ethnic ratios of their districts' noncharter public schools. The majority of charter schools deviated within only 10 percentage points from noncharter schools in their sponsoring districts with regard to the percentage of American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander, and African-American students (see Appendix D for a full presentation of ethnic representation data).

The within-district comparisons for Hispanic and White students revealed slightly greater variation, however. Although approximately 50% of schools deviated within only 10 percentage points of the district figure, in 19% of schools White students exceeded the district percentage by more than 25 points (see Figure II-5). In 18% of schools, Hispanic students were less than the district percentage by more than 25 points (see Figure II-6). On average, the percentage of White students in charter schools was 9.2 percentage points *more* than the percentage for noncharter schools in their sponsoring districts, and the percentage of Hispanic students in charter schools was 8.6 percentage points *less*. It is likely that at least part of this discrepancy reflects patterns of residential segregation, as opposed to any efforts on the part of charter schools to be exclusionary. For example, conversion schools that are located in ethnically homogeneous communities will almost certainly lack diversity, given that they must give preference to neighborhood students. Another possible explanation is that the relatively small size of most charters may not allow them to offer the breadth of programs that would appeal to students with diverse interests and backgrounds.

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[13] State figures come from CBEDS 1996-97, as reported in the Public School Summary Statistics, Educational Demographics Unit, CDE. Charter school percentages were calculated from the CBEDS 1996-97 database downloaded from the Internet. Both sets of percentages were calculated by taking the total number of students in a category divided by the total number of students enrolled.

[14] Throughout the report, percentages may add to more than 100 because of rounding.

[15] Data are based on 13 schools; data were not available for 2 schools.

[16] Only district-sponsored charter schools were included in the analysis.

Figure II-5: Difference in White Student Enrollment between Charter Schools & Noncharter Schools
(Within-District Comparison)

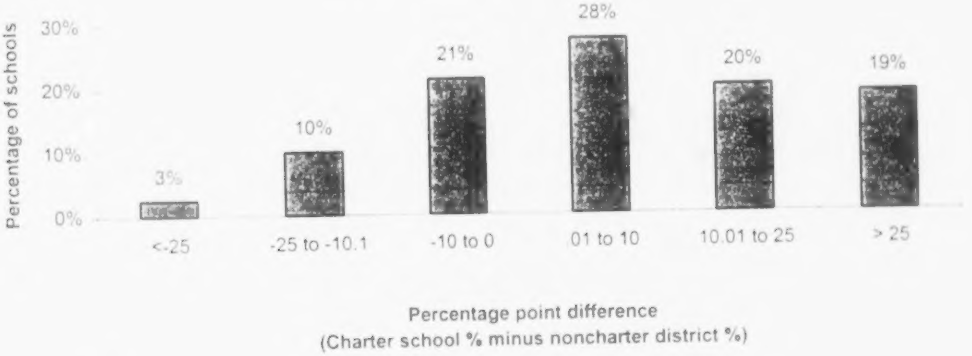
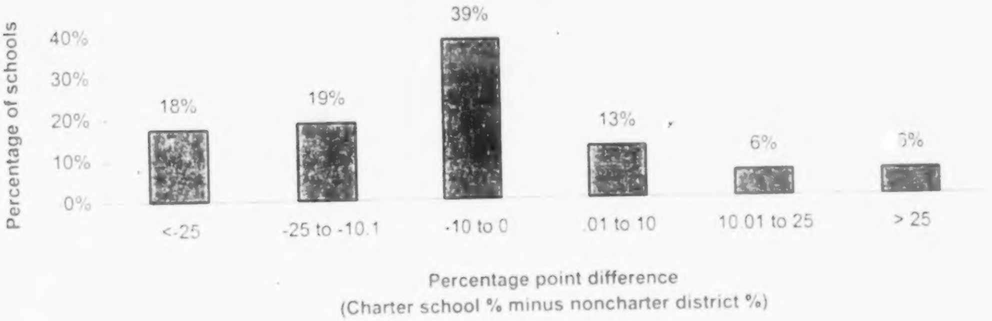


Figure II-6: Difference in Hispanic Student Enrollment between Charter Schools & Noncharter Schools
(Within-District Comparison)

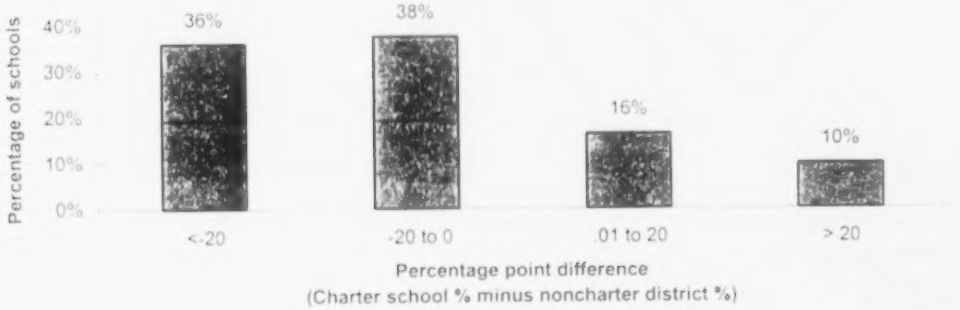


- **Using free/reduced-price lunch program eligibility as an indicator, charter schools served levels of low-income students similar to the state average.**

Approximately 43% of all students enrolled in the charter schools were eligible for the National School Lunch Program (providing free or reduced-price school lunches to students, based on the income level of their parents), compared with 47% statewide—a difference of only 4 percentage points.[17] (It should be noted that 12 out of the 73 schools that responded to this survey item said that 0% of their students were eligible; it is possible that some of these schools did not participate in the lunch program. Likewise, it is possible that some of the 25 charter schools that did not respond to this question did not participate in the lunch program.)

A comparison at the district level, however, revealed slightly greater differences between charter school and noncharter school students. On average, the percentage of students eligible for the lunch program at charter schools was 17 percentage points *less* than the total percentage for noncharter students in the sponsoring districts. As Figure II-7[18] illustrates, in approximately 36% of the charter schools, the proportion of students eligible for the lunch program was more than 20 percentage points *less* than that in their district's noncharter schools.

Figure II-7: Difference in Lunch Program Student Eligibility between Charter Schools & Noncharter Schools
(Within-District Comparison)



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[17] The charter school calculations were based on the responses of the 73 schools that provided information regarding their students' eligibility in the National School Lunch Program. State data were provided by the Education Finance Division of the CDE.

[18] Only district-sponsored charter schools were included in the analysis. District data came from the Education Finance Division of the CDE, and totals were calculated by first removing all charter school students from the district population. Charter school data came from the telephone survey, item C1. The database from the Education Finance Division did not include enough data from charter schools to use for this analysis.

A Closer Look

Of the schools in which home-based study was the primary mode of instruction for most students, only 6% of the students were reported to be eligible for the National School Lunch Program.[19] However, since the number of students in these schools was small (n=698), the effect on average free/reduced-price lunch eligibility in all charter schools was negligible (mean in non-home-based charters = 44% vs. mean in all charter schools = 43%).

Urban charter schools enrolled a greater number of students who were eligible for the lunch program than schools at other locations. On average, 73% of students at urban charter schools were eligible, compared with 36% for rural, 41% for suburban, and 30% for small-town charter schools.

Charter schools were also asked whether or not they were eligible for Title I—the federal program serving low-achieving students. Funding allocations to eligible applicants are based on the proportion of students from low-income families served in these schools and districts. Charter schools varied on whether or not they were eligible for Title I funds: 36% reported they were eligible, 2% reported their eligibility was pending, and 36% reported they were not eligible. More importantly, however, 24% of charter schools did not know whether they were eligible for this large-scale federal funding program. There was a pattern among charter schools of a low level of knowledge about school finances. Further evidence and implications are discussed in Chapter III.

- **Charter schools served percentages of special education students similar to the state average.**

Approximately 8% of all students enrolled in the charter schools received special education services, compared with 9% of the total public school population in California.[20] Special education services were provided either by the school or by the sponsoring agency. Most of the case study schools that provided special education services did so through their district or county sponsors. The charter schools usually contracted with the sponsoring agency for these services as part of their charter agreements.

Start-up schools were less likely to provide special education services (either directly or indirectly through their sponsors) to students in their schools than were conversion schools. In fact, 26% of start-ups said they did not have any students receiving special education services, compared with only 6% of conversion schools. This difference is not surprising, given that conversion schools were linked into the complex system of special education legislation and regulation before becoming charter schools. Case study conversion schools either provided the services that were previously delivered at the school site or maintained previous connections to district services. Unfortunately, many start-up school leaders were not as familiar with special education and believed, usually incorrectly, that the district automatically took care of this area.

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[19] Only 7 out of 15 home-based schools responded to this question.

[20] The total population figure refers to the 1994-95 school year. U.S. Department of Education, cited in Education Vital Statistics 1997. *American School Board Journal*, December 1997.

Although charter schools served percentages of special education students comparable to those in noncharter schools, special education was an area that was marked by uncertainty for many charter schools and sponsoring agencies. This situation is not surprising, since special education is a complex maze of regulations that is difficult for staff at noncharter public schools to comprehend. For charter schools, the situation is further complicated because they must determine how their educational programs and the waivers of the charter school law mesh with federal special education laws and regulations. Most of our case study charter schools had little knowledge in this area. Even in cases where services were provided by sponsors to charter school students, many charter school directors were not involved in—or even aware of—the special education referral, assessment, and placement process. Some charter schools reported being uncertain whether or not students had Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) before attending their schools. In these cases, they reported problems with obtaining student files from regular public schools. They also believed that parents withheld information regarding their children's special education needs from charter school staff when they enrolled them because they thought this label stigmatized them.

Charter schools reported a lack of information from the California Department of Education about what their responsibilities were regarding special education. One charter school located in a district other than its sponsoring district was unsure of whose responsibility it would be if a student with severe needs showed up at the school. This charter school worried that meeting the needs of one child with severe disabilities could bankrupt them. The sponsoring district was also very concerned about this liability issue and was waiting for guidance from the California Department of Education. Another district realized that charter school directors in the district were not aware of any of the special education rules and regulations. The district was very concerned about students with disabilities who were not being linked to appropriate services and was working to make charter directors more aware of the special education requirements by developing a training course for them.

Since charter schools often provided small classes and individualized instruction (two components of special education programs), the needs of students in schools that were not providing special education services may have been addressed in a less formal manner. However, the issue of how charter schools—which are based on a theory of waivers from regulations—are supposed to comply with the highly regulated area of special education is an important issue that charter schools and the state must address.

A Closer Look

Of the schools in which home-based study was the primary mode of instruction for most students, only 3% of the students received special education services.[21] However, since the number of students in these schools was relatively small (n=2,569), the effect on the overall percentage of students receiving special education services in all charter schools was negligible (mean in non-home-based charters = 9% vs. mean in all charter schools = 8%).

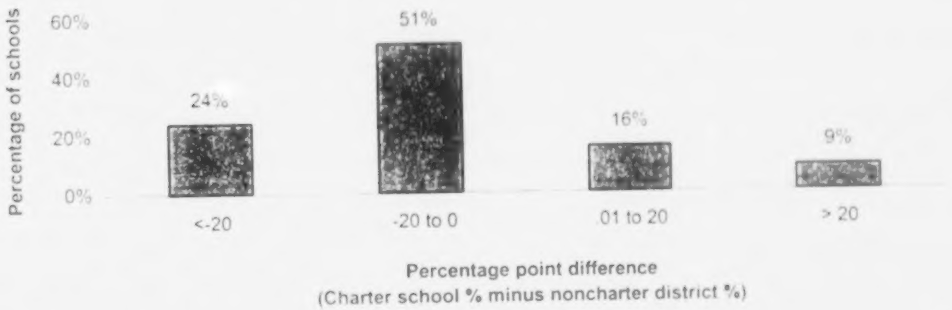
Almost one-third (30%) of all small schools reported that **no** students received special education services, whereas 14% of medium/small schools, 23% of medium/large schools, and none of the large schools reported that **no** students received special education services.

- **Overall, charter schools served slightly fewer LEP students than the state average.**

Twenty percent of all students enrolled in charter schools were identified as limited English proficient (LEP), compared with 24% of the public school population statewide.[22] A district-level comparison, however, revealed that, on average, the proportion of LEP students at charter schools was almost 8 percentage points *less* than the total proportion among noncharter students in sponsoring districts (see Appendix D for a full presentation of LEP representation data). In fact, the percentage of LEP students was more than 20 points *less* than the total percentage for noncharter students in the sponsoring district in 24% of charter schools (see Figure II-8).

Figure II-8: Difference in LEP Student Enrollment between Charter Schools & Noncharter Schools

(Within-District Comparison)



Start-up schools were less likely to have students identified as limited English proficient in their schools than were conversion schools. In fact, more than half of the start-ups (53%) reported that no students were identified as LEP, compared with only 17% of conversions.

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[21] Thirteen out of 15 home-based schools responded to this question.

[22] CBEDS 1996-97, Public School Summary Statistics, Educational Demographics Unit, CDE.

A Closer Look

Small schools (fewer than 100 students)—which are more often start-up schools—were less likely to have LEP students: 77% of these schools reported that none of their students were identified as LEP.

Of the schools in which home-based study was the primary mode of instruction for most students, only .4% of the students were identified as LEP.[23] However, since the number of students in these schools was relatively small (n=2,519), the effect on the overall percentage of LEP students in all charter schools was negligible (mean in non-home-based charters = 21% vs. mean in all charter schools = 20%).

Urban charter schools enrolled a greater percentage of LEP students than did schools in other locations. On average, 31% of students at urban charter schools were identified as LEP, compared with 23% at suburban, 18% at rural, and 8% at small-town charter schools.

- **Languages spoken in charter schools were similar to those spoken by students statewide.**

Most charter school LEP students spoke Spanish (87%). As illustrated in Table II-4, this was higher than the proportion in the statewide LEP population, which was 79% Spanish-speaking. Other languages represented in charter schools were similar to the statewide LEP population, except for Vietnamese, Cantonese, and Tagalog, which were slightly underrepresented in charter schools.

Table II-4
LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY LEP STUDENTS IN CHARTER SCHOOLS

	Percentage of LEP Students	
Language Spoken	**Charter Schools** (n=90)	**Statewide**[24]
Spanish	87%	79%
Vietnamese	1%	4%
Hmong	3%	2%
Cantonese	.5%	2%
Tagalog	.8%	2%
Korean	.9%	1%
Lao	.3%	.8%
Russian	1%	.5%
All other languages	5%	9%

- **On average, 41% of charter school students were low achieving.**

One intention of the Legislature in enacting the charter law was to "increase learning opportunities for all pupils, with a special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for pupils who are identified as academically low achieving" (Education Code Section 47601 [b]).

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[23] Twelve out of 15 home-based schools responded to this question.
[24] CBEDS 1996-97, Public School Summary Statistics, Educational Demographics Unit, CDE.

Unfortunately, there is no agreed-on definition for the term "academically low achieving." On the basis of schools' own definitions, they reported, on average, that 41% of their students were categorized as academically low achieving.[25] The criteria most charter schools used to determine the percentage of low-achieving students were scores on standardized tests (80%) and grades from previous schools (52%). Schools also reported using other methods, such as teacher evaluations/assessments/observations, portfolios, performance-based assessments, attendance, and parent assessments. We were not able to compare low-achieving students in charter schools with statewide or district averages because these data are not compiled in regular public schools.

Start-up schools reported enrolling a greater percentage of low-achieving students than conversion schools—37% of start-ups reported that 51-100% of their students were low achieving, compared with only 25% of conversions. These statistics are not necessarily contradictory with reports that start-up schools serve relatively fewer LEP and special education students. In our case study schools, we found that many start-up schools were designed to serve at-risk students, such as those who have been expelled, have dropped out, or have failed to succeed in traditional public schools. These students are not necessarily LEP or special education students; rather, they are students with special needs.

A Closer Look

Urban charter schools reported a greater percentage of low-achieving students (54%) than other schools (suburban, 33%; small-town, 34%; rural, 43%). More than half of the urban charter schools (53%) reported that 51-100% of their students were low achieving, compared with 24% for suburban, 13% for small-town, and 36% for rural charter schools.

Similarly, county-sponsored charter schools reported a greater percentage of low-achieving students than did district-sponsored charter schools. On average, 57% of students in county-sponsored charter schools were low achieving, compared with an average of 39% in district charter schools. Along the same lines, almost half of the county-sponsored schools (43%) reported that most or all of their students (76-100%) were low achieving. Only 14% of district-sponsored charter schools reported this high a concentration.[26] These statistics are not unexpected, since many county-sponsored programs—charter and noncharter—were specially designed to serve special-needs students.

- **On average, charter schools enrolled a slightly higher percentage of students considered gifted than the percentage of students enrolled in statewide gifted programs.**

Approximately 9% of all students in charter schools were considered to be gifted and talented students; in other words, charter schools reported that these students *would qualify* for the state's Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program or a similar program.[27] In comparison, 7% of the statewide student population were *enrolled* in the GATE program.[28] This statistic reinforces other evidence (see section on school admission policies) that charter schools are not "creaming" high-achieving students. This parity with the state average holds true when looking at start-up and conversion schools, with 8% of start-up and 10% of conversion students reported to be qualified for GATE.

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[25] This figure does not refer to the total charter school population but is an average of the percentages reported by respondents. Unlike other survey questions, which asked for a number of students, this item asked respondents to estimate a percentage of students.

[26] Note that 7 county-sponsored charter schools and 85 district-sponsored schools responded to our survey.

Instructional Staff Characteristics

- **Charter schools employed both full-time and part-time instructional staff, most of whom had credentials.**

On average, two-thirds of charter school instructional staff were employed full-time and one-third were part-time. Their sponsors, in contrast, employed on average 85% full-time instructional staff. Full-time charter school employees were more likely than part-time employees to have full state certification for the subjects they taught in their schools (mean = 83% and 49%, respectively). Part-time employees, however, were more likely than full-time employees to have special education credentials (mean = 11% and 4%, respectively). On average, charter schools reported that 71% of all instructional staff (full-time and part-time) had credentials.

Conversion charter schools were more likely to have full-time staff—53% of conversions reported that most or all of their staff (76-100%) worked full-time, compared with only 33% of start-ups. Teachers at start-up schools were less likely to have credentials than their counterparts in conversion schools. On average, 66% of teachers at start-up schools had credentials, compared with 77% of teachers at conversion schools (see Table II-5). Start-up schools also were less likely than conversion schools to have teachers with special education credentials. More than three-fourths of start-up schools (77%) reported that **no** full-time staff at their schools had special education credentials, compared with only 25% of conversion schools.

Table II-5

CHARTER SCHOOL TEACHERS WITH CREDENTIALS: START-UP VS. CONVERSION SCHOOLS

	Overall (n=96)	**Start-up** (n=48)	**Conversion** (n=48)
Mean percentage of all full-time and part-time staff with credential	71%	66%	77%

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[27] Charter school directors were asked to estimate the number who qualified, regardless of whether or not their school had a GATE program (n=89).

[28] The state GATE participation rate is a tentative estimate for 1996-97 using data run by the CDE's Education Finance Division on September 11, 1997.

- **Overall, charter school teachers had an ethnic composition similar to teachers statewide.**

Charter school instructional staff were primarily White, not of Hispanic origin (71%). Non-White instructional staff represented the following ethnic groups: Hispanics (17%), Blacks (not of Hispanic origin) (6%), Asian or Pacific Islanders (4%), American Indian or Alaska Natives (1%), and Filipinos (1%). These percentages are similar to those found in all public schools in the state (see Table II-6).

Table II-6
RACIAL/ETHNIC TEACHER DEMOGRAPHICS[29]

Race/Ethnicity	Charter School Teachers (n=2,790)	Teachers Statewide (n=250,527)
White, not of Hispanic origin	71%	78%
Black, not of Hispanic origin	6%	5%
Hispanic	17%	11%
Filipino	1%	1%
Asian or Pacific Islander	4%	4%
American Indian/Alaska Native	1%	1%

Start-up schools were less likely to have an ethnically diverse teaching staff than were conversion schools. In fact, Hispanic, Filipino, and Asian/Pacific Islander teachers appeared to be underrepresented in start-up schools. One-half of the start-up schools reported that they did not have any Hispanic teachers, compared with only 23% of conversion schools. In addition, greater percentages of start-ups reported that they did not have instructional staff who were Filipino (94%) or Asian/Pacific Islander (77%), compared with 75% and 52%, respectively, of conversion schools.

- **Charter schools depended on volunteers to fill both instructional and support roles.**

According to the school survey, charter schools depended on nonpaid instructional staff as part of their educational programs. Some of the roles played by volunteers are typically paid positions in noncharter schools; other roles are generally filled by volunteers in charters and noncharters alike. Many charters, especially those with home-based learning, relied heavily on parents; fewer schools also depended on people from the community. Charter schools reported that the most common roles of nonpaid instructional staff were tutoring and helping in the classroom with reading groups. Charter schools also reported that volunteers helped with playground/recess supervision, art classes, and library assistance. Some charter schools had educational programs built around community expertise. For example, one school had parent and community volunteers teach elective courses.

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[29] State figures come from CBEDS 1996-97, as reported in the Public School Summary Statistics, Educational Demographics Unit, CDE. They include only credentialed instructional staff. Charter school figures include all staff, whether or not they have credentials.

- **Nearly two-thirds of charter schools reported that some or all instructional staff were members of unions or other bargaining units.**

Although charter schools are not required by law to join bargaining units or unions, many schools (or at least some teachers in many schools) maintain these connections. Nearly two-thirds of charter schools (63%) reported that some or all of their instructional staff were members of unions or other bargaining units. (See Chapter III for further discussion.)

Teacher contracts in a large percentage of schools contained a high number of contract provisions typically found in contractual agreements with unions (although the exact nature of the provisions may have been different). Table II-7 illustrates the provisions that charter schools included in either their contractual agreements (union and non-union) or their personnel policies for instructional staff.

Table II-7

CHARTER SCHOOL CONTRACT PROVISIONS

	Percentage of Schools	Number of Respondents
Annual performance evaluations	89%	96
Coverage by district retirement benefits or equivalent	85%	89
Benefits package equivalent to or better than the district's package	79%	85
Due process for dismissal proceedings	76%	95
Minimum hours of work	66%	96
One-year at-will contract	58%	93
Granting of tenure at the school or acknowledgment of teacher's right to return to tenured position in district	55%	87

Start-up schools were less likely to include tenure, an equivalent benefits package, and minimum hours of work, compared with conversion schools. Start-ups were more likely to have 1-year at-will contracts—68% of start-ups, compared with 48% of conversions. Conversion schools were more likely to have staff members who belonged to unions (see Table II-8)—79% of conversion schools reported that some or all of their instructional staff were members, compared with 47% of start-ups. Half of the conversion schools reported that **all** of their staff belonged to unions, compared with only 16% of start-up schools. These comparisons remain robust when home-based study schools are excluded: 71% of start-ups vs. 47% of conversions had 1-year at-will contracts; 78% of conversions vs. 49% of start-ups had some or all staff members who belonged to unions; and in 51% of conversions vs. 16% of start-ups, **all** staff belonged to unions. One might expect that primarily home-based schools would be less likely to have teacher contract provisions, and thus would bias the start-up figures (24% of the start-ups were home-based schools), but that is not the case.

Table II-8

CHARTER SCHOOL TEACHER UNION MEMBERSHIP: START-UP VS. CONVERSION SCHOOLS

	Overall (n=97)	**Start-up** (n=49)	**Conversion** (n=48)
All teachers were members of bargaining units or unions	33%	16%	50%
Some teachers were members of bargaining units or unions	30%	31%	29%
No teachers were members of bargaining units or unions	37%	53%	21%

A Closer Look

Teacher contracts and personnel policies at charter schools with financial autonomy differed greatly from those at charter schools that reported more ties to their sponsoring agency. For example, 70% of financially autonomous charter schools, compared with 26% of other charter schools, reported that none of their teaching staff belonged to unions. Conversely, only 8% of the financially independent charter schools reported that **all** of their teachers belonged to unions, compared with 43% of the non-financially independent schools.

Financially autonomous (FA) schools were less likely to report the inclusion of various provisions in their contractual agreements or personnel policies:

- Granting of tenure/acknowledged right to return (32% of FA schools vs. 63% of non-FA)
- Coverage by district retirement benefits or equivalent (58% of FA schools vs. 95% of non-FA)
- Benefits package equal to or better than district's (62% of FA schools vs. 84% of non-FA)
- Minimum hours of work (48% of FA schools vs. 71% of non-FA).

- **Starting teacher salaries in charter schools were consistent with the state average.**

Starting teacher salaries reported by charter schools were consistent with the state average of $25,500.[30] The average salary for teachers new to the teaching profession in charter schools was approximately $27,200, with a range from $20,000 to more than $35,000. Some charter schools, primarily those in independent/home study charters, compensated teachers on the basis of the number of students they taught. There was little difference between the salaries of teachers in start-up and conversion charter schools.

A Closer Look

On average, starting salaries were slightly higher at financially autonomous schools—approximately $28,600 at these schools, compared with $26,700 at schools that did not report financial independence. Starting salaries were also slightly higher at urban schools, which reported an average beginning salary of approximately $29,600, compared with $27,000 (suburban), $27,000 (small-town), and $25,000 (rural).

Conclusion

The data show that charter schools were smaller, were slightly less diverse, and had somewhat more restrictive admission policies than other public schools in California. The data also show that there were striking differences between start-up and conversion charter schools. In general, start-ups tended to be farther from the district or state norm on several dimensions than were conversion schools. Compared with conversion schools, start-up charter schools were smaller, more often enrolled students from a wide geographic area, and served more nontraditional grade ranges (e.g., grades 5-8). They were more likely to have instructional staff without union representation and to have fewer traditional contract provisions for instructional staff (e.g., tenure). Start-ups were also less likely to serve special education and LEP students than were conversion schools. At the same time, however, they reported, on average, serving more low-achieving students than conversion schools. Often, start-up schools were designed to serve students who do not succeed in regular school programs. Of course, start-up status did not determine the eventual characteristics of the charter school. Other factors, such as the charter school's relationship with its sponsoring agency and support from the local teachers, school board, and community, played a role as well. Still, start-up charter schools ended up with decidedly different characteristics than both regular public schools and conversion charter schools.

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[30] This 1994-95 salary figure is an estimate from the American Federation of Teachers, *Survey and Analysis of Salary Trends*, as cited in *Digest of Education Statistics 1996*, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Washington, D.C. (November 1996).

The 15 survey respondents who identified home-based study with the parent as primary instructor as the predominant method of instruction for most students had a distinct profile.[31] They were most often located in small towns or rural areas, and were somewhat more likely to require parent contracts, more likely to enroll White students, less likely to enroll LEP students, and less likely to have special education students. The number of schools in this category, and the number of students they serve, is so small that their impact on overall charter statistics is negligible. However, because they represent a distinct variation on charter schools—one, moreover, that was not envisioned by the authors of the legislation—it is important to point out where they differ from charter schools as a whole.

Next, Chapter III presents more detailed information on motivations for starting a charter school, the development of a charter agreement, and school-sponsor relationships.

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[31] Recall that several other schools identified home-based instruction as one of several instructional methods used, but they are not classified with schools that are predominantly home-based.

III. CHARTER SCHOOL GOVERNANCE, FINANCE, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

This chapter focuses on several topics: (1) the development of charter agreements, (2) the ongoing relationships between charter schools and their sponsoring agencies, (3) charter school financial arrangements, (4) charter school accountability, and (5) the advantages of charter status. We begin with a review of the motivations for charter school petitions, the charter-granting process, charter revisions, and opposition. We then report our findings on the degree of independence between charter schools and their sponsors, especially in connection with staffing, day-to-day operations, and governance. The third section of this chapter contains a discussion of charter school finance based on our research and includes information about charter school financial arrangements and liability. We then discuss several observations about charter school accountability and conclude with the advantages of charter school status.

There are four principal lessons from the data reported in this chapter. First, charter schools cannot be viewed in isolation from state and local reform efforts, from the communities within which they operate, or from the politics of their sponsoring agencies (school districts, county offices of education, and the state). In the case of conversion schools, there were also educational and organizational legacies from their precharter incarnations. Motivations to establish charter schools always occurred in the context of existing institutional arrangements or in reaction to them. Different sets of stakeholders had opinions about charter school practices at the individual school level, as well as about state and district policies and practices. Certain charter schools and charter school practices drew opposition from certain collective bargaining interests with concerns about job security and other teacher rights. Some community groups opposed charters as too selective in student admissions.

Second, few charter schools achieved financial independence, even though financial independence is permitted by the charter school legislation. In most charter schools, finances were at least partially controlled by the sponsor, although start-up schools were more likely to have financial autonomy than were conversion schools. The financially autonomous schools we studied reported that they realized significant cost savings by controlling their own budgets.

Charter schools had varying degrees of interest in having financial autonomy. Several school leaders did not want to take on the added responsibility of managing school finances. Many leaders questioned the viability of being financially independent. It is challenging, if not impossible, for most charter schools to cover facilities costs without help from the sponsor or an outside agency.

Third, sponsoring agencies held charter schools accountable for their fiscal operations more systematically than for their educational outcomes. The political and educational appeal of charter schools was the "change from rule-based to performance-based accountability" (Education Code 47601[f]) in schools that were expected to be granted autonomy within the public school system. Yet it was not always clear who was or should have been monitoring the school and student outcomes and other charter goals. In some cases, this lack of oversight was due to indifference by the sponsoring agency or the fact that the district was not accustomed to monitoring academic progress at individual schools. It appeared that some schools and sponsoring agencies intended to defer these accountability questions until charter renewal.

Fourth, we found that concerns about their own liability kept some sponsors from loosening their control of charter schools. Several sponsors reported that their belief that they would ultimately be held liable for charter schools' financial or educational failure discouraged them from giving charter schools more freedom. Sponsor liability remains a large gray area in charter legislation. CDE recently published recommendations to the State Board of Education on the financial operation of charter schools. These proposals on the assignment of fiscal responsibility, fiscal oversight, financial audits, charter school revenue limit, and average daily attendance (ADA) calculations need additional analysis and debate. The subject remains ambiguous as of the end of 1997.

The Development of Charter Agreements

Motivations for charter school petitions

There were many motivations for establishing charter schools in California. In the case study schools, these motivations included a desire for innovation, alternatives to existing programs, a particular curricular focus, or more parent participation in the education program. The particular motivation was often determined by the role and perspective of the petitioner, as the following examples suggest.

In at least five conversion schools we examined, the charter idea grew to fruition within a preexisting school. In these cases, the original charter petition was written by some combination of administrators, teachers, and parents. The charter was seen as a way to extend previous reform efforts or to pursue new ideas. In one case, the charter was sought to allow staff to lengthen the school day to allow for an ambitious foreign language program and additional time for teacher collaboration and professional development. In another case, a charter high school, its rationale included increased graduation requirements and an emphasis on foreign language instruction. The new thinking underlying another of these sites was to remake a low-performing school from the inside by redeploying and increasing the resources that were originally controlled outside the school.

In three other cases we studied, two start-ups and one conversion, parents were instrumental in bringing the charter idea to the table. In one of these cases, parents were attracted to the charter school option as a way to attract children back from the private schools by developing "an *esprit de corps*" within the community. In another, a group of parents wanted an alternative to district middle schools. Parents went on to staff this school after meeting the concerns of the bargaining unit and the school board about teacher qualifications and student assessment. The third school, a start-up, resulted from the efforts of parents and a teacher who wanted a school with an instructional focus on performing and visual arts.

Two charter schools we examined, one start-up and one conversion, were started by the sponsoring agency. In one case, those inside the system were looking for ways around the restrictions of the Education Code and were willing to experiment with different ways to bring about change. In the other case, those at the sponsoring agency sought to insulate existing programs from changes in external politics. In both cases, the charter concept and petition were closely coordinated by parties within the sponsoring agency rather than outside it. Instead of being approached by agency outsiders, administrators designed their own charter entities. Neither charter encountered opposition from outside the system. Today, both charters include multiple components and enjoy the continued support of their respective sponsors.

There are two outliers from the above categories. One school was a start-up with a strong home study and independent study component. It was proposed because the founding director, a teacher in the sponsoring district, wanted to give parents more control over their children's education. The other outlier school was selected as a charter experiment when a county coalition of activists and politicians approached the sponsoring school district with a school reform proposal. The district picked the school for the pilot because of its poor reputation in the community and low test scores.

Charter-granting process

The California Education Code allows public school districts and county offices of education to sponsor charter schools. It also allows the State Board of Education in conjunction with the Superintendent of Public Instruction to sponsor charter school districts. According to our survey, most charter schools reported *district sponsorship* (87%). In addition, seven charter schools (7%) reported *county sponsorship*, and six schools (6%), which were located in the two existing charter districts, reported *sponsorship by the California Department of Education*.

Although most schools had district sponsors, the relationships schools developed with their sponsors and the process schools underwent to become charter schools varied tremendously.

The charter school approval process requires that teachers, parents, and/or administrators petition a sponsor, usually a local district. Charter school developers must address 14 areas of their schools' programs, including the governance structure of the school, the means by which the school will achieve a racial and ethnic balance, and the public school alternatives for students residing in the area who choose not to attend the charter school (Education Code, Section 47605). In practice, charter documents vary from detailed descriptions of every aspect of the school's operation to a broad outline of the school's plan.

Sponsoring agencies take a variety of approaches in considering and approving charter petitions. Fewer than a third of the sponsoring agencies responding to this item on the district and county surveys reported that they had written policies on granting charters (12 out of 41, or 29%).[1] Many seem to have informal policies; others, especially agencies that have received numerous charter petitions, have well-established routines. The following examples illustrate some of the variation in how this process played out in the schools we visited.

In one case, a variety of issues arose as a result of a charter petition and were addressed fairly systematically. The school board wanted to make sure the school would attract a student body that was representative of the district as a whole in terms of special needs and ethnicity. The board was also concerned about student assessment; this concern was resolved when the petitioners agreed to administer the same test as used in the rest of the district. The union questioned why teachers were not required to have credentials in the original petition, so the school compromised by requiring that its lead instructor be credentialed. The charter-granting process took about a year of school board meetings, a board study session, and numerous meetings between the district and charter organizers.

The process was more difficult for two other schools. In one, vocal demands by community groups and the union led to a number of retreats by the petitioners on class size, goals for student achievement, and student admission policies. The director described her appearance before the school board on behalf of the school as "a horrendous experience." She said that board members treated her "as if we were trying to do something illegal and immoral. ... [It made me feel like] I was being questioned in a way that really went to the core of my professional reputation. I did not like it at all." At the other school, there were bad memories of the charter submission, revision, and approval process. School staff who went through the ordeal describe the sponsoring agency as disorganized and inconsistent in their feedback on the petition. School respondents also sensed a suspicion on the part of the board and others in the sponsoring agency that the charter petitioners "were trying to get away with something."

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[1] These data are based on surveys completed by 39 districts and 9 counties (response rate of 56%). An analysis of nonrespondents indicated that respondents had significantly larger student populations than nonrespondents (on average, responding agencies served 31,607 students, while nonrespondents served an average of 10,920 students). However, we found no statistically significant differences between the two groups with regard to geographic location (southern, central, and northern California) or student socioeconomic status (participation in the free and reduced-price lunch program). Given the slight bias in size and our low response rate, it is important to interpret these findings with caution. They are not necessarily representative of the entire population of charter school sponsoring agencies in California.

Our district survey data indicated that few school districts and counties had denied approval to charter school petitions. However, it is important to note that the district and county surveys were administered to those agencies that were sponsoring charter schools and not to agencies without charter schools. Therefore, we do not have data on petition denials from districts without charter schools. Of the 45 sponsoring agencies that responded to this survey item, 41 had not denied approval to any charter petition. Most agencies, in fact, (n = 33) had received only one petition: the one they approved. The following reasons were cited by the four districts that denied one or more charter petitions (respondents were allowed to cite more than one reason): *inadequate instructional program or instructional emphasis* (n = 3), *inadequate organizational capacity* (n = 1), *inadequate financial management or financial accountability system* (n = 1) and *inadequate accountability system for student learning/outcomes* (n = 1). One sponsoring agency added that charter petitions were denied because the school organizers were unable to find a location that met earthquake safety standards. Another denied a petition because of concerns about the charter school's "impact on existing schools, particularly in relation to ethnicity." According to our district survey data, no petitions were denied because of *lack of teacher support, lack of parent/community support, projected enrollment too small, opposition of teacher union,* or *school board not supportive of charter concept.*

Revisions to charter proposals

Many charter school founders were not able to secure approval on the basis of their original charter proposal. Instead, charter school survey respondents reported that they were required to *revise their original charters* (31%) and/or *enter into written side agreements* (25%). Only 3% of schools reported that they *entered into unwritten side agreements*. The revisions and agreements covered a wide range of areas but frequently were related to the issues listed in Table III-1.

Table III-1

TOPICS COVERED IN CHARTER SIDE AGREEMENTS AND REVISIONS

	Percentage of Schools (n=48)
Amount of funds the school would receive	44%
Teacher contract and personnel issues	42%
Financial independence	42%
Liability	38%

Other elements of the charter, such as *curriculum and instruction*, the *charter amendment process*, *governance*, *student admissions*, and *assessment* were less frequently included in the amendments or agreements with the sponsor. Other items that were sometimes addressed in these negotiations were transportation, the funding process, hazardous materials, enrollment growth, and business plans. The required amendments were more likely to concern administrative and financial issues than instructional issues.

A few schools thought that the changes they were required to make hindered the school's ability to *implement its educational program as envisioned* (13%), but most schools thought these changes either helped or had no effect. Most schools also reported that these amendments and/or agreements either helped or had no effect on their ability to do the following: *select, evaluate, and/or dismiss staff*; *control how and where they purchase goods and services*; *receive the revenue limit and categorical funds generated by enrollment*; *remain financially solvent*; and *be accountable for education results*. This is a significant finding because some charter school observers assume that any changes to petitions that were requested by the sponsoring agency would have a detrimental effect. Our school survey data indicate that this was not the case. In many instances, the approval process seemed to have led to appropriate revisions to charter petitions.

Charter Opposition

Opposition to original charter petitions took various forms. In the case study sample, the goals and tactics of those who wanted to open charter schools were often seen (and sometimes intended) as open challenges to established interests within public school bureaucracies. In many cases, opponents to the charter were placated by changes to the petition prior to passage. In other instances, opposition continued or new opponents surfaced during implementation of the charter.

Among the case study schools, charter opposition fell into the following categories: (1) objections or concerns raised by bargaining unit representatives representing teachers or classified employees, typically at the outset of the charter process (in some cases, this opposition has continued); (2) opposition by community groups that are outside the public system; and (3) opposition within sponsoring agencies because of relations that have deteriorated since the charter was granted.

Collective Bargaining Units. The California Teachers Association's (CTA) opposition to the current charter law in California began with the rivalry between the 1992 charter school bills in the Assembly and the Senate. The Senate bill, S.B. 1448, was opposed by the CTA because, unlike the competing Assembly bill (A.B. 2585), it did not require charter sign-off by the leadership of local bargaining units. S.B. 1448 became the Charter Schools Act of 1992 and left the details of collective bargaining to charter petitioners and local sponsors. The Charter Schools Act also allowed for a larger number of charter schools than the CTA thought was appropriate (Hart & Burr, 1996). Today, the CTA and other critics of the original law are more likely to acknowledge the benefits of charter schools under certain conditions (e.g., schools that hire credentialed teachers and require collective bargaining).

Despite the visibility of state and local union objections to the charter law and their misgivings about certain charter school practices, collective bargaining units took varying positions on charter schools in California. As the following examples suggest, local circumstances determined local bargaining unit positions regarding charter petitions. Three schools we studied encountered no opposition from bargaining units when they submitted their original petitions. In one case, teachers at the school lost their tenure and seniority rights when the charter began, but no objections were raised by any party. In another case, the charter did not encounter any union opposition because there were no unions in the district. In the third school, existing union rules were not affected by the charter, and teachers remained members of the district union.

In other cases we examined, bargaining unit representatives expressed mild concerns or raised a few questions but did not oppose the original charter. In two of these schools, where teachers remain members of the district employees' association, the unions wondered whether the charters would automatically change or suspend the contracts but were persuaded that they would not. The third school met union concerns by rewriting the charter petition to require that certain instructional personnel be credentialed teachers.

In three other charter schools we studied, initial opposition by teacher bargaining units led to more protracted negotiations and, in one of them, more substantial concessions than the instance described above. In the first school, a major compromise on hiring was negotiated to placate the teachers' association. When the school first opened as a charter entity, the principal was permitted to select one half of the teaching staff and district seniority rules were used for the other half. Teachers remained members of the association, but most were skeptical of the value of collective bargaining and resented the union for its continued opposition to the school. In this and the other two schools, teachers and the principal cooperated on interviewing and selecting new teachers, which suggests that charter hiring had become more collaborative over time, despite the original concerns of the respective teacher unions.

In a final set of three charter schools we examined, union opposition was directed at the whole charter concept or the charter concept as it was embodied in a particular school. In these schools, union opposition was not mitigated by concessions. In one start-up charter school, the union objected to its use of noncredentialed teachers. In one conversion school, the teachers' union pressured its members not to sign the charter petition. The pressure almost succeeded in stopping it; only by soliciting teachers who were nearing retirement (teachers who, therefore, would not be teaching at the new charter school) did the school's organizers get the required signatures. In another start-up, the union showed its opposition to the charter by excluding the teaching staff at the new school from the existing district contract.

Ongoing relations with unions also varied. In several cases, charter status did not alter union relationships or teachers' bargaining rights. In others, even though teachers remained on union membership rolls, there were tensions between the two parties. In a few schools we visited, it appeared that working conditions might have been better for the staff if they were part of an agency contract. According to school staffs, low pay and heavy workload in three non-union schools led to high turnover among teachers, a circumstance that may have hindered student learning. Yet there were other cases where the absence of collective bargaining had no effect on teacher longevity and teacher satisfaction. The large number of charters that are due to be renewed in the next few years will give future researchers an opportunity to continue tracking these issues.

Public Interest Groups. The second type of opposition involved community public interest groups and other activists who criticized the charter plans as divisive. Fearing, in one case, that the "white community was breaking off," these voices influenced the board to require that the school maintain an ethnic balance in its student body. Indeed, concern about persistent or increasing racial segregation may have consequences when charters are up for renewal in two schools. Interestingly, the racial homogeneity of a third case study school did not jeopardize its charter renewal recently, despite the board's earlier concerns about this disparity.

Sponsoring Agencies. Finally, another type of opposition emerged within sponsoring agencies because of deteriorating relations with schools since their charters were granted. In one case we studied, the school and the district never agreed on financial matters and the division of fiscal responsibilities. For example, the school claimed that it received "surprise" bills from the district for special education services, invoices that totaled $300,000 last year. Leadership changes in the sponsoring district may cause trouble for another charter school we examined, which district leaders criticized for insisting on too much autonomy and too little accountability for student learning. Two other schools we studied enjoyed the support of district leadership but faced strong resistance within specific offices and divisions. This resistance slowed the processing of transactions between the school and the district, or resulted in meetings and phone calls that, in the opinion of school-level respondents, wouldn't be necessary if charter school policies were more consistent across all the units of the sponsoring agency.

Charter Renewal. As we mentioned above, charter renewal may provide an opportunity to revisit the concerns and objections that were voiced in regard to the original charters. For example, some of our interviews revealed that charter school administrators may be waiting for the renewal process to address certain accountability issues. The Education Code allows charters to be granted for a maximum of 5 years. Most schools have not yet completed the first "cycle" of the charter. As of June 1997, according to our school survey, only 13% of charter schools in California had gone through a renewal process for their charters. However, 64% of the charters in the state are due to be renewed by the year 2000. Only 8 of the 41 sponsoring agencies that responded to the district survey item had written policies on charter renewal, suggesting that charter renewal may be handled on an *ad hoc* basis.

Charter renewal may be less contentious than the original petition process. Two of the schools we studied recently renewed their charters without encountering any opposition. In one case, the charter was renewed 1 year early. In the other, the school's small size was cited by the sponsoring district for its lack of concern about many matters, including charter renewal. This will be an important issue for future research on charter schools.

The School-Sponsor Relationship

Relationships between charter schools and their sponsors were as varied as all other aspects of charter schools. They ranged from full dependence on the sponsoring agency to nearly complete independence. Some schools, in fact, were dependent to the point that the advantages of their charter status were obscured. Some charter schools were held accountable by their sponsors for academic outcomes, but most were not (in contrast to financial outcomes). Almost all schools, though, held themselves accountable to parents. Some charter schools enjoyed collegial relationships with their sponsoring districts; others had relationships that were more contentious. Overall, the relationships between charter schools and their sponsoring districts were still evolving. Both sides of the relationship were working toward defining respective rights, roles, and responsibilities. The amount of conflict involved was in part related to how well a charter school fit with its sponsoring district's mission, or how far a charter school pushed the district to change the status quo.

Charter school independence

In theory, charter schools are free from all rules and regulations described in the California Education Code. The text of the charter school law states that "a charter school shall comply with all of the provisions set forth in its charter petition, but is otherwise exempt from the laws governing school districts except as specified in Section 47611"[2] (Education Code Section 47610). However, this unrestricted freedom was not the reality in many charter schools across the state. In fact, charter school staff and sponsors as a matter of course made distinctions between "independent" and "dependent" charter schools. Although it is difficult to come up with universal definitions of independent and dependent charter schools (different schools use the terms differently), independent charter schools were generally those that made their own programmatic, personnel, and financial decisions, whereas dependent charter schools were subject to district policies and procedures, except where they sought waivers.

Most charter schools did not take advantage of all aspects of their "automatic waiver" from state and district regulations because their sponsoring districts or counties did not allow it, or because they made concessions to the union or the sponsor during charter negotiations. For example, a charter school may be required by its sponsor or the union to follow state rules and regulations regarding teacher dismissal. In many cases, districts also maintained control over certain critical aspects of the school, often to ensure compliance with districtwide policies. (A smaller portion of charter schools did not associate charter status with certain freedoms because they were permitted by the district before the school had a charter, e.g., flexibility with the daily calendar or student assessment policy.)

The end result of charter-granting negotiations was typically an understanding (or a compromise) regarding the amount of control or autonomy the charter school would have. As a result, most charter schools reported having varying degrees of control over school decisions, from the school budget to curriculum and assessment. Survey data indicate that few schools (11%) were fully independent, i.e., they reported having full control over all 10 areas listed in Table III-2.[3]

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[2] Education Code Section 47611 refers to the state's Teacher Retirement System.

[3] For each decision or policy, schools were asked how much control they had: full control, partial control, or no control. See Appendix A, item F1, Charter School Survey Instrument, for definitions of these terms.

Table III-2

SCHOOLS REPORTING FULL CONTROL (RANKED IN ORDER OF FREQUENCY)

	Percentage of Schools	Number of Respondents
Daily schedule	83%	96
Student disciplinary policies	71%	96
Purchasing of supplies and equipment	68%	97
Establishing curriculum	63%	97
Student assessment policies	56%	97
Student admission policies	51%	97
Other budgetary expenses	51%	97
School calendar	49%	97
Staff hiring, discipline, and dismissal	44%	96
Staff salaries and benefits	31%	97

Data from the district and county survey on sponsoring agency perceptions of charter schools' control of the above areas were compared with responses from the school survey. This comparison, presented in Table III-3, included cases where data were available from charter schools *and* their sponsors. The Level of Agreement column displays the percentage of schools and sponsoring agencies with consistent perceptions of full, partial, or no control over a particular area. Please note that these numbers include the perceptions of some sponsoring agencies that have multiple charter schools. Even though the charter school is the "unit of analysis," and the following table includes only data from the cases where the charter school and its sponsor both responded, some of the sponsoring agencies are responsible for several charter schools. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this table is a corollary of the data presented in the level of agreement column. In many cases, there is a mismatch in the perceptions of schools and sponsoring agencies about the degree of charter school control over particular areas. For example, there are low levels of agreement in the perception of control of *student admission policies, school calendar,* and *staff hiring* between charter schools and their sponsors.

Table III-3

Level of Agreement between School and Sponsor Perceptions of Control

	Percentage of Charter Schools and Sponsors in Agreement	Number of Schools and Sponsors Agreeing on Full Control	Number of Schools and Sponsors Agreeing on Partial Control	Number of Schools and Sponsors Agreeing on No Control	Number of Respondents
Daily schedule	78%	44	5	0	63
Student disciplinary policies	73%	36	10	0	63
Purchasing of supplies and equipment	68%	33	10	0	63
Establishing curriculum	72%	31	15	0	64
Student assessment policies	63%	19	21	0	63
Student admission policies	53%	20	13	1	64
Other budgetary expenses	58%	23	13	1	64
School calendar	55%	26	8	1	64
Staff hiring, discipline, and dismissal	53%	19	14	0	62
Staff salaries and benefits	73%	17	9	20	63

Staffing and day-to-day operations

Staffing was the area over which charter schools reported exercising the least amount of control. School survey data show that only 31% of charter schools reported having full control over *staff salaries and benefits* (over 40% reported they had no control), and only 44% reported full control over *staff hiring, discipline, and dismissal*. This pattern was supported by the schools in the case study sample. Four of the seven dependent[4] charter schools in our sample were bound by most hiring-related provisions of the union contract with the district (the other three schools did not have union representation). Two of these schools, however, were given significant waivers from some contract provisions. The first school received a waiver that enabled teachers to collaborate with the principal on the selection and placement of teachers. This school was also able to implement its own hiring process, which required prospective teachers to teach a sample lesson. In the second case, the school was waived from adhering to the district's seniority system, in which teachers with seniority were given preferential treatment for positions at new schools or new positions at existing schools. As a direct result of the pressure applied by this school, the district negotiated with the union to discontinue this system in all district schools.

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[4] Seven out of 11 charter schools in the case study sample were dependent charter schools. This does not include the charter district.

Firing or dismissal was even more tightly controlled by the district or county sponsor in dependent charter schools. The single exception in our case study sample was a school in which instructors were not represented by a teachers' union. This school had full control over firing as well as hiring. There were, however, two other dependent schools without union representation that *did not* have the power to fire their own staff. Both of these schools were unusual in that they were started at their respective sponsors' initiative, and from the beginning the sponsors retained close control to the point that they treated these schools as if they were not charter schools.

The four independent charter schools in our sample, in contrast, had full control over hiring and firing. It is true, however, that teachers at one of these schools had return rights to the district until the expiration of the school's charter in 1998, and so would more likely be reassigned to another school than fired.

Charter schools were most likely to report that they had full control over determining their *daily schedules* and *student disciplinary policies*, as well as *purchasing supplies and equipment* and *establishing curriculum*. To a limited degree, however, dependent charter schools in our case study sample retained close ties to the sponsor regarding curriculum. For example, in at least five cases, charter schools—like their sponsors—followed the state adoption lists for instructional materials. As one principal explained, "I see the value in seeing things that have a rating from a committee." (Along these same lines, only about one-third of the schools that did not have full control would have liked more control over *establishing curriculum*, according to the school survey.) In a more unusual case, curriculum for the charter school was in the process of being developed in conjunction with a district committee. This school served primarily students that had been expelled from the district—students with needs similar to those served by the district's alternative high school. For this reason, the charter school was being included in the district's overall efforts to revamp its alternative education curriculum (it is not clear that the charter school was given a choice in this matter, but the director was participating in the curriculum design).

Gaining more independence

Charter schools had varying degrees of interest in gaining more authority or control over school policies. In many of our case study sites, schools that had dependent relationships with their sponsors were satisfied with these close ties. In some ways, the schools were conservative.

(One principal told us more than once that she liked the traditional relationship between her school and the district.) These schools tended to be clear on what they wanted to gain from charter status, and were wary of the costs of taking on more responsibility than they could handle. In most cases, what dependent schools gained was exemption from certain Education Code and/or district regulations. For example, four dependent schools were able to use noncredentialed teachers. One school was able to serve students who had been expelled from the district. Another school was able to have graduation requirements that exceeded those of the state and the district. Another school was able to lengthen the school year to 210 days.

Data from the school survey also suggested that charter schools did not want to assume many of the responsibilities and costs of running a school. Prominent among these was the job of managing school finances. Notably, only about one-third of the schools that did not have full control wanted more control over *staff salaries and benefits*. The principal of one case study school explained that he did not want to fight with the district to receive the funds the school was entitled to, as he had seen happen among independent charter schools in the district. Moreover, he did not think his school could survive financially if it were completely separate from the district. Teachers at other schools were most concerned with maintaining the benefits and protections that were written in their union contracts. And in a few cases, charter schools were reluctant to lose the legitimacy that came with being part of the district (i.e., insulation from external claims that the school has no accountability).

There were exceptions to these schools' satisfaction with the status quo, however. On the survey, more than half of the charter schools that did not have full control reported wanting more control over *purchasing* and *staff hiring, discipline, and dismissal*. Among our case study sample, three charter schools that were dissatisfied with their dependent (or quasi-dependent) relationships with their respective sponsors and wanted to become more independent. In one case, the dissatisfaction stemmed from a small but vocal group of parents who believed that financial independence would benefit the school. Teachers at this school, however, were concerned about job security if the school became independent and wanted to maintain the status quo. The second school had made small steps toward becoming financially independent, with the support of both school and district staff. Leadership at the third school likened its current arrangement of financial dependence on the district to the "fox minding the hen house."

Charter school governance

Within charter schools, various governance structures evolved. Virtually all of our case study schools had some type of representative charter council or collection of committees with different areas of responsibility. Again, the degree of control vested in charter schools varied, but it was unusual to see situations where no charter-related governance or advisory bodies had evolved. Some charter councils were strictly advisory to the sponsoring agencies, which retained tight control of the school. Others councils ran the school with little or no input from their sponsoring districts. (This level of autonomy sometimes caused problems between the charter school and the district.) Some councils had autonomy over certain areas, like the instructional program, but not others, such as school revenues and expenditures. A few of our case study schools were hard to characterize because of continuing disputes with their sponsoring agencies over governance issues. Moreover, there were different distributions of power and authority, sometimes conflicting perceptions about who was in control, and varying degrees of authority vested in charter directors, charter councils, and sponsoring agencies.

According to the school survey, the majority of charter schools (88%) included parents on their governing bodies. At most charter schools, a small group of parents served on the governing bodies for a set term, such as 1 year. One school we examined reported that parents rotate in and out of the governing body throughout the year—allowing every parent to participate in decision-making for a limited time. In many of our case study schools, parents played significant roles in school decision-making, including, in two cases, hiring decisions. At one of these schools, a parent chaired the main charter governance body, and parents made up half its membership. At a third school, parents also served on the school's governance board, but they constituted a minority of its members, at the insistence of teachers. Some of the parents we interviewed at the school would like to increase the trust between the two groups "so teachers don't have to feel that they need to be the majority [on the governing board]." Finally, in a fourth school, teachers objected to the makeup of the charter governing body, where the majority of its members were parents and students. To paraphrase the concerns of one teacher, parents don't become educators overnight, but they have been given a lot of power overnight. Parents at this school need to be educated on how to be part of the process. Interestingly, overall parent involvement was quite low at this school, except for their strong presence on the governing board.

Collegiality and conflict

With few exceptions, the relationships between the case study charter schools and their sponsors were collegial. At the same time, we heard complaints about specific areas of concern from both sides of the relationship. Two schools, both dependent, complained about being treated as a low priority for training opportunities by the district. One of these schools also complained about not being used as a "lab" school by the district to test new ideas. Another school, this one independent, reported that the district routinely neglected to inform them of relevant district business. In a few cases, schools also complained about the time it took to cut through the district bureaucracy to process requests and reports, and to get waivers from district policies.

Two of the charters had relationships with their sponsors that were best described as hostile. The bitterness in both relationships stemmed from disagreements about finances. In one case, the school simply wanted complete financial autonomy. In the other case, the school and the sponsor disagreed over the amount the district charged for special education services and the amount the district "skimmed" for administrative functions. In the latter case, the principal believed that disagreements had led to a high staff turnover, and thereby had a negative impact on the school's educational program.

To a large degree, the collegial relations that charter schools enjoyed with their sponsors can be explained by the extent to which each school was a good fit with its respective sponsor's philosophy and/or reform orientation. The school that illustrated this point most clearly was actually started at the initiative of the district to serve the large number of students who had been expelled because of the district's zero tolerance drug and alcohol policy. Starting a charter school enabled the district to continue to serve these students indirectly. Other charter schools, as designed, amounted to continuing efforts of ongoing reforms in the district. It is less clear what these schools gained from being charter schools. In at least two cases, charter schools were in alignment with the sponsors' belief in providing parents with alternatives for their children's education. As one district official told us, charter schools were congruent with the community's strong support for parent choice and individual rights.

Charter School Finances

In most charter schools, finances were at least partially controlled by the sponsor. According to the school survey, only 27% of schools had financial autonomy (i.e., they had full control over staff salaries and benefits and other budgetary expenses). Start-up schools were more likely to report financial autonomy than were conversions (85% vs. 15%).

A theme that runs throughout the issue of charter school finance is fluidity and uncertainty. Although schools tended to categorize themselves as financially autonomous or dependent, a continuum would be a more accurate way to describe them. Financial agreements between many charter schools and sponsors were works in progress. Several sponsors told us that the way they funded their charter schools was still being worked out. Negotiations year-to-year (or more often) seemed to be commonplace, particularly with independent schools. Schools and sponsors were still working toward defining respective rights, roles, and responsibilities with regard to finance and other areas.

Funds Retained by the Sponsoring Agency. As part of their financial agreements with charter schools, many sponsors required charter schools to pay them a portion of their budgets to cover centralized costs, such as administrative and maintenance services provided by the district. There is much confusion over the exact amount retained by the sponsoring agency. Charter schools, on average, reported paying their sponsoring agency 11% of the total revenues generated by their schools (the range was 0% to 40%). However, 30% of the schools reported that they did not know the amount retained by the sponsor, indicating that this average may not accurately represent the amount of funds charter schools are required to pay districts. Many schools' ignorance on this point reflects their lack of knowledge about financial matters in general. This issue is discussed later in the chapter.

On the other hand, sponsoring agencies reported withholding an average of 8% of the total revenues generated by charter schools, according to the district and county surveys. This number must be interpreted with caution, since it represents only 39 of the 80 "Charter School Supplements" completed in conjunction with the district survey (see Appendix A for a copy of this survey supplement). Sponsoring agencies gave no response for 32 charter schools. Nine other supplements were discarded because the sponsoring agencies reported that they withheld all or nearly all the revenues for these charter schools, suggesting that the charter schools had dependent relationships with their sponsors and controlled few, if any, of their revenues.

Almost all charter schools (54 of 57, or 95%) and sponsoring agencies (61 of 63, or 97%) responding to the respective survey items reported that charter schools received services in exchange for these funds. Thirty-nine percent of the schools that were required to pay the district this fee for centralized goods or services reported that they would have purchased them elsewhere if allowed to do so. On the district and county surveys, sponsoring agencies reported (n=64) that they performed the following services in exchange for retained funds: *payroll*, performed for 84% of charter schools; *bookkeeping*, 83%; *budget preparation*, 70%; *meeting state regulations*, 78%; *supplies and equipment*, 42%; *reduced or free rent*, 62%; and *other goods and services*, 53%.

Some schools contracted with external agencies or individuals other than the district or county for financial accounting or management services. Charter schools reported contracting out for *bookkeeping* (20%), *payroll* (17%), *budget preparation* (15%), and *other services*, such as preparation of audits and financial statements (11%).

Dependent Charter Finances. Among the case study schools, the most typical financial arrangement between schools and their sponsors was one in which schools were essentially funded as they would be if they were not charters. These schools received the same pro rata share of state revenue limit and categorical funds as other schools in the district. Like other schools in the district or county, charter schools paid for their share of centralized services provided by the district. Typically, the schools had control over certain funds, such as School Improvement, some categorical funds (although not special education), grants awarded to the site (e.g., Annenberg), and money from fundraising efforts. This, again, was no different from other schools in most districts. Under these arrangements, districts provided special education services, as well as all facilities services and administrative functions, such as payroll, accounting, and reporting.

All purchase orders from these financially dependent charter schools went through district purchasing departments (i.e., got district approval), but none of the schools reported that this was a barrier. At the same time, district officials made statements indicating that their role in purchasing went beyond being a rubber stamp. For example, one district business officer told us that he has discussions with the school director about what's "appropriate" for the school to purchase.

Independent Charter Finances. The financially independent schools in our sample had more variable financial arrangements with their sponsors. All three received an allocation based on ADA, which is calculated according to charter regulations.[5] Beyond the revenue limit funds, these schools, we were told, received the categorical funds "that they are entitled to." We found that the financial knowledge base of the school leader made a profound difference in the level of resources that an independent charter school received. On one end of the spectrum was a large conversion school whose director's financial expertise had enabled the school to negotiate allocations and district withholding and increase the school's share of district funds. At the other end of the spectrum was a small start-up school with a director who was unfamiliar with school finance. The director was unsure of how much the district retained to cover administrative costs, and he was unaware of whether the school was eligible for any special education or GATE funding (on the basis of what he told us about his student body, the school was probably eligible for both).

Low levels of knowledge regarding school finance were not unique to independent schools, but these schools were at a disadvantage without it. School survey data showed that unfamiliarity with the financial side of schools was widespread among directors of all charter schools. For example, 24% of the charter school directors surveyed did not know whether they were eligible for Title I (these were mostly start-up schools). Also, only a small proportion of school directors were able to report funds received in budgetary categories other than state revenue limit, making the data unusable for this study.

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[5] Revenue limit allocations vary according to whether the sponsoring agency is a unified school district, a high school district, an elementary district, or a county office of education. County sponsors must comply with separate state rules on revenue limit apportionments (California Department of Education, *Charter Schools Questions Update, December 24, 1993*; memorandum). Some administrators of unified districts questioned the revenue neutrality of charter schools in cases where elementary charters were allocated the full revenue limit amount for a unified district. This amount is likely to be higher than the amount allocated to noncharter elementary schools in the district.

The financially autonomous case study schools reported significant economies gained by controlling their own budgets. Unlike dependent charter schools, these schools did not have to go through the district purchasing process, but could make autonomous decisions about how to spend their money and which suppliers to use. Two schools we visited controlled their own maintenance and operations budgets and were able to purchase supplies and equipment at local retailers rather than using district purchasing procedures, which were described as slower and more expensive. At one school, a teacher gave an example of being able to purchase floppy disks directly from the supplier much more quickly and for one-fifth the cost charged by the district. Another school was able to offer staff a benefits package that was greater in scope than that offered by the district.

Financial Viability. There is a question of whether charter schools, as funded by law, have the financial resources to operate truly independently. According to officials in several sponsoring agencies, the answer was no. As one district business officer explained, revenue limit funds were insufficient to cover facilities costs.[6] Without help from the sponsor or an outside agency, paying for facilities was a real challenge for charter schools. They either had to borrow money (if possible) or cope with inadequate facilities. An independent study conducted in one school district to ascertain the viability of charter schools operating as financial entities reached the same conclusion. Survey and case study data supported this assertion as well. Fifty percent of charter schools surveyed reported using a district facility at no cost. Two of the three independent case study charter schools paid virtually no rent (one school paid $1/year). The third school rented three rooms in a local community building; the school's low personnel costs (e.g., the director also taught half-time; parents volunteered to teach electives) made this arrangement affordable. The dependent schools' facilities costs were covered by the sponsors (with the exception of some of the independent study/home school charter sites). Several of the dependent schools also pointed out that their sponsors subsidized them in other ways, such as covering start-up costs and providing security and financial services, making it clear that full independence was unrealistic for the schools.

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[6] Revenue limits are not sufficient for (nor intended to cover) facilities costs at noncharter schools. School districts rely on bonds and developer fees to cover facilities costs.

At the same time, 76% of financially autonomous schools responding to the survey rented facilities independent of the sponsor, so facilities were clearly affordable for some. It is not known, however, how many of these schools paid market rates; anecdotal evidence suggests that not all did.

Currently, a source of financial support for charter schools is grants awarded by the California Department of Education through Title X of the federal Improving America's Schools Act (IASA). In addition to using these funds to help with start-up costs, the CDE uses these funds to address the state's "three core components of successful charter schools: high educational standards and a powerful assessment system, a strong fiscal base, and an organizational/governance structure that empowers all participants to work effectively for the success of the school."[7] Thirty-four grants were awarded to charter schools and developers during the 1996-97 school year upon successful completion of a rigorous application process. Twenty-five of the grants were awarded to existing charter schools, and nine were given to charter developers. The total dollar value of the awards was $1,430,164, and individual awards ranged from $9,150 to $50,000. The CDE also created a Charter School Revolving Loan Fund to assist new charter schools (conversion schools are not eligible) with start-up costs. The CDE began making loans in the 1996-97 school year.

Financial Benefit to Sponsors. There were a few case study examples in which sponsors appeared to be receiving a financial benefit from their charter schools. In one case, the sponsoring district expanded the original charter school to include off-site centers that operated GED and job training/placement programs. In exchange for 40% of the ADA-related funds the centers generated, the district provided curriculum, staff development, and administration, so that the centers could offer students a high school diploma. It appears that the district comes out ahead with this financial arrangement. This expansion was done at the district's initiative, not the original charter school's. The district was able to effect this change because it had very tight control over the day-to-day operations of the charter.

In the other two cases, the districts were open to the charter concept, at least in part, because they saw it as a way to reverse declining district enrollment. It was believed that having a charter school or schools would encourage parents to keep their children in public schools. And in both cases, the charters have drawn significant numbers of students from outside district boundaries, thereby netting an increase in district enrollment.

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[7] *Public Charter Schools Program Annual Performance Report, July 1997*. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education.

Liability. Concerns about their own liability kept some sponsors from loosening their ties to charter schools. According to district and county surveys, 15 (38% of responding sponsors) *prohibit charter schools from becoming legally independent*, while 11 (28%) *allow, but do not require, charter schools to become legally independent*. Other sponsoring agencies reported not having a formal policy on legal independence.

Several of our case study sponsors reported that their belief that they would ultimately be held liable for charter schools' financial or educational failure discouraged them from giving charter schools more freedom. In at least three districts in our case sample, this point of view was shaped by past negative experiences with charter schools. For example, one district previously sponsored an independent charter school with minimal oversight, only to discover later that the school was failing to provide a legitimate education for its students. (Interestingly, whereas some districts were concerned with their ultimate liability, several districts appeared willing to give their charter schools independent status. In one case, the district was concerned with liability if the school *did* remain closely tied to the district. In another case, the district wanted to prevent further accusations that it was denying the school all the resources to which it was entitled.) Open-ended responses on the district survey included several comments about liability concerns. In the words of one district respondent, "We are concerned about district liability. We seem to have responsibility but not authority."

Sponsor liability remains a large gray area in charter legislation. We were told by districts that the state charter office has no definitive guidelines on liability, and that issues will not be resolved until cases are litigated. On the other hand, a state-level official calls liability a "straw man" that districts use to keep from giving charters independence. The California Department of Education recently issued several recommendations to the state board of education regarding the financial operation of charter schools (California Department of Education, 1997a). However, the recommendations are only "a starting point for discussion and debate on the precise nature of changes that need to be made in statute and regulation in order to address these difficult issues" (page 14). Until clarification is made by the Legislature or the courts, the liability issue remains ambiguous.

Clearly, sponsors' liability concerns are not allayed by schools' coverage through liability insurance, because survey data show that 98% of charter schools had some form of coverage. Table III-4 describes the various charter school liability arrangements.

Table III-4
CHARTER SCHOOL LIABILITY COVERAGE

	Percentage of Schools (n=96)
Coverage under sponsor's policy	75%
Insurance purchased from a private commercial carrier	13%
Insurance purchased from a local or statewide school insurance pool	7%

Three percent of charter schools reported that they had some other arrangement for liability coverage, such as being covered under a policy of their charter partner or fiscal sponsor, or having some combination of sponsor and private coverage. Financially independent charter schools reported very different liability arrangements than other charter schools: only 36% were covered by their sponsoring agency (compared with 89% of non-financially independent charter schools), and 40% purchased insurance from a private commercial carrier (compared with 3% of non-financially independent charter schools).

Accountability

It is the intent of California charter law that charter schools will substitute performance-based accountability for conventional rule-based accountability systems. In other words, charter schools are supposed to be given freedom from certain restrictions in exchange for more accountability for academic outcomes. For the most part, however, charter schools seem not to be held to a higher standard of accountability for students' academic performance than are noncharter schools. This is not to say that charter schools are not assessing student progress on their own, because they are (see Chapter V). Nor is it to say that there is widespread abuse of the freedoms given to charter schools. The schools we examined had measurable (to varying degrees) academic goals stated in their charters, but most reported that they were not held accountable for achieving these goals by their sponsoring district or county. Likewise, the case study charter district had not been held accountable for academic progress by the state. Although 85% of schools said they reported *student achievement* data to their sponsors, only 4% reported that the sponsor had ever *requested specific actions or imposed sanctions* in response to any data, achievement or otherwise, according to the school survey. Although not representative of the universe of sponsoring agencies, data from the district and county surveys paint a similar picture. Three sponsoring agencies (8% of those responding to this item) said that they requested actions or imposed sanctions on charter schools in response to these data. The number was higher with respect to noncharter schools in the same districts and counties: seven sponsoring agencies (17%) requested actions or imposed sanctions. In the case study sites, sponsors did not routinely compare case study charter schools' test scores with those of noncharter schools in the district. And even less frequently did sponsors look at charter schools' progress toward attaining their stated goals as part of an annual review process. Several of the schools reported providing the sponsor with an annual report (either oral or written), but these reports usually did not include outcome data. When asked, districts often said that accountability was something they needed to address district- or countywide, that it was a problem that went beyond charter schools.

On the other hand, district and county sponsors were much more diligent about financial accountability. According to the survey, 91% of schools reported *finance and accounting data* to their sponsor. All the schools in our case study sample reported submitting periodic financial reports to the district, and charter law requires all schools to have annual audits. Sponsor and, in some cases, school staff were determined not to let their charter schools become headline stories of fiscal mismanagement. Some of the dependent charter schools mentioned this kind of district oversight as an advantage.

It may be that a reorientation toward accountability is needed for districts to become accustomed to holding schools accountable for academic performance. As it is, noncharter public schools are not held accountable for academic outcomes by districts, and districts are not held accountable for academic outcomes by the state (but districts are held accountable for finance), and so it should not be surprising that districts appeared to be continuing in the same pattern with charter schools.

It may also be that sponsors are waiting until the formal renewal process to evaluate how well the school has done in meeting its objectives and determine whether or not the charter will be renewed. As mentioned above, only 13% of schools had gone through a renewal process as of June 1997. Sixty-four percent of the schools reported that they will have gone through the renewal process by the year 2000.

In contrast to the lack of accountability to sponsors for academic outcomes, most charter schools reported feeling accountable to parents in this area. Ninety percent of schools reported that they systematically assessed parent satisfaction by using multiple methods, including surveys (100%), interviews or focus groups (59%), and behavioral indicators (40%). Charter schools also reported determining parent satisfaction by some other means (32%), such as informal communication with parents, parent meetings, volunteerism, or returning enrollment.

Table III-5 displays data from the district and county surveys on accountability reporting requirements for charter and noncharter schools. There is a strong degree of consistency in the accountability requirements for charter and noncharter schools in the same district or county. For example, almost all sponsoring agencies required *student achievement test scores* and *finance and accounting data* from both charter and noncharter schools, among those sponsoring agencies that responded to this item. In two cases, the sponsoring agency did not require the reporting of student achievement data from any of its schools; in five additional cases, these data were required from noncharter schools but not from charter schools. *Teacher-assigned grades* stood out as the type of data with less consistency in reporting requirements across the sample of districts and counties: 41% of sponsoring agencies responding to the surveys required reporting of grades from noncharter but not charter schools.

Table III-5

Sponsoring Agency Accountability Data Requirements for Charter and Noncharter Schools

	Percentage of Sponsors with Same Requirements for Charters and Noncharters	Percentage of Sponsors Requiring Type of Data from Charters *and* Noncharters	Percentage of Sponsors *Not* Requiring Type of Data from Charters *or* Noncharters	Number of Respondents
Finance and accounting data	97%	92%	5%	37
Other data	91%	5%	86%	37
Student achievement test scores	87%	81%	6%	36
Parent satisfaction data	78%	51%	27%	37
Student scores from authentic assessment tests	78%	47%	31%	36
Student behavior indicators, e.g., attendance	76%	73%	3%	37
Teacher-assigned grades	59%	43%	16%	37

Advantages of Charter Status

District- and county-sponsored schools

As we demonstrate throughout this report, there is tremendous variability in what it means to be a charter school. One way to gain insight into the perceived benefits of charter school status is to analyze the school within its sponsoring agency's context. In other words, would a regular public school in the district or county have the flexibility that the charter school has, or is this flexibility a result of charter status? Charter schools reported that their charters provided them with unique opportunities in several areas, ranging from personnel to finance. When school survey respondents were asked specifically what charter status allowed them to do that they could not have done under the traditional district management structure, charter school directors most frequently reported that they were able to *allocate resources in a manner different from the district norm* (87%). Table III-6 illustrates the frequency with which survey respondents specified the benefits of charter status.

Table III-6[8]
BENEFITS OF CHARTER SCHOOL STATUS

	Percentage of Schools (n=85)
Allocate resources in a manner different from the district norm.	87%
Contract for services with nondistrict providers.	84%
Provide support to teachers to improve their skills.	82%
Purchase materials in a manner different from the district norm.	80%
Dismiss teachers for unsatisfactory performance.	54%
Reward teachers for exemplary performance.	52%

Perceptions of charter impact varied greatly, depending on the charter school leaders' sense of autonomy. Financially autonomous (FA) schools were more likely to report that charter status enabled them to dismiss unsatisfactory teachers (85% of FA vs. 40% of non-FA) and purchase materials in a different manner (92% of FA vs. 74% of non-FA). Start-up schools were also more likely to report being able to dismiss teachers for unsatisfactory performance, compared with conversion schools (67% vs. 38%).

Respondents in four case study sites had difficulty identifying just what they gained from being a charter, that is, what they were doing differently because they had charter status. In three cases, it is likely that the schools would have been able to implement their educational programs without being charters, given the reform orientation of their respective districts and the history of reform efforts within the schools before becoming charter entities. Charter status, however, insulated these schools—at least theoretically—from district policy changes that responded to shifts in the political climate. For example, one principal expressed his belief that a few years ago it would have been difficult for his school to institute its rigorous graduation requirements, which exceeded those of other schools in the district, given the prevailing views in the district at that time. Being a charter school allowed the school to implement a program that was less vulnerable to change from outside forces. In the fourth case, the charter's vision and sense of purpose were lost when the founder left. For the first three schools mentioned, however, charter status gave the staff a sense of empowerment and of being part of a significant reform process. One teacher explained, "The fact that we are a charter, that we are in charge of our destiny, has forced an attitude change. We have a sense of power we never had before, whether it is true or an illusion." Also, there appears to be a public relations advantage associated with being a charter school that helps the schools attract parents.

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[8] These data do not include responses from the six schools in the state's two charter districts. We report their perceptions in the next section of this chapter.

Charter district schools[9]

Overall, schools in charter districts did not report overwhelming changes as a result of converting to charter status. When asked specifically what charter status allowed them to do that they could not have done under the traditional district management structure that existed before they became a charter district, most school leaders reported that they were able to do the following (see Table III-7):

Table III-7

BENEFITS OF CHARTER STATUS FOR SCHOOLS IN CHARTER DISTRICTS

	Percentage of Schools (n=5)
Allocate resources in a manner different from the district norm.	40%
Contract for services with nondistrict providers.	80%
Provide support to teachers to improve their skills.	40%
Purchase materials in a manner different from the district norm.	60%

On the other hand, charter district schools unanimously reported that charter status **did not** allow them to reward teachers for exemplary performance or dismiss teachers for unsatisfactory performance.

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[9] Directors of charter district schools were given a slightly modified survey. This section reports on two items that were tailored to these particular types of schools.

When asked to describe what they gained at the school level from being in a charter district (i.e., how the school compared with when it operated in a noncharter district), school leaders reported moderate changes:

> "It hasn't changed a whole lot yet. One thing is that it has added more options to meet the needs of kids who aren't making it. . . . Ask me in a couple of years and you'll probably see more."
>
> "It is tightening everything up. . . it is holding people more accountable."
>
> One principal noted that they were just in their first year, and thus a lot was similar to how things were prior to becoming a charter district. "We wanted to take it slow," he noted. He added that there had been some deviation on instructional materials (different from the state). In addition, the school also had the option of hiring noncertificated staff (which they had not done yet).
>
> Another director reported that a lot of what they were doing they would have done even without charter status. "We were on the track of doing what we wanted to do" when the charter law came around and "fit into our vision." He noted one specific change: parent involvement had increased since it had become mandatory. In his opinion, there had been good compliance with the minimum hour requirements and the strategy had "paid off"—it had kept lines of communication open, and parents felt that they could "come, talk, and be heard."
>
> "It focused professional development. . . and made the change process easier because it focused us on the pillars of the charter. It gave the school a focus." This principal also noted that a lot of what they were doing at their school was "nothing particularly new" and that many others were also doing these things without charter status.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that one of the districts had received charter status only 1 year prior to this study.

Conclusion

As we have demonstrated elsewhere in this report, it is difficult to generalize about charter schools in California. Our findings about charter school governance, finance, and accountability are no exception. There were many motivations for starting charter schools, numerous outcomes of the charter-granting process, several types of charter opposition and support, and a variety of relationships between these schools and their sponsoring agencies. However, a few patterns emerged with respect to charter school finance and accountability. There was fluidity and uncertainty in the fiscal affairs of both financially autonomous and financially dependent schools. Financial liability was another area of uncertainty and concern in most, if not all, charter schools and sponsoring agencies. Accountability requirements for charter schools and noncharter schools in the same sponsoring agencies tended to be consistent, with a stronger emphasis on financial accountability than on accountability for student achievement. Finally, although some schools had difficulty articulating the advantages of charter status, the most commonly cited advantages were the freedom to allocate resources in a way chosen by the school, to contract for services and purchase supplies from nondistrict providers, and to provide support for teachers.

In the next chapter, we expand on the topic of accountability for student learning when we present our findings on teaching and learning in charter schools.

IV. TEACHING AND LEARNING IN CHARTER SCHOOLS

The California Charter Schools Act states that charter schools are intended to "encourage innovative teaching methods," "provide parents and teachers with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system," and "create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning at the school site" (Education Code, Section 47601).

The interpretation of these goals, however, is open for debate. For example, innovation can be thought of as a *unique* approach—implying that charter schools are expected to implement new and unconventional classroom practices. On the other hand, innovation can be viewed in relative terms—suggesting that a charter school's educational program is innovative if it is different from the norm within its local district or, in the case of a conversion school, if it represents a change from its precharter program and practices. Some charter school proponents argue that innovation can also be accomplished through changes in a school's locus of control. In other words, in their view, a charter school's newly gained power—in exchange for increased accountability—over a range of matters, including governance and finance, as well as instructional methods and materials, regardless of what these features look like or whether they are implemented, constitutes innovation and the potential for creating change in the classroom. Charter schools can also be seen as innovative in competitiveness. By providing alternatives within the public school system, charter schools might create competitive pressure on school districts to change their practices in ways that improve education throughout the public school system.

In addition to these definitional problems, the comprehensive nature of changes within charter schools also complicates the assessment of whether they have achieved "innovation." Many charter schools evolved out of a desire to experiment with new organizational and management structures. For example, they may have wanted to become a charter school to gain more control over purchasing or teacher selection and dismissal. Although not directly related to pedagogy or curriculum, these changes are inextricably linked to principles of teaching and learning. In these cases, it can be difficult to separate such organizational changes or "innovations" from the academic ones.

Given these challenges, we found it difficult to evaluate the quality and nature of teaching practices within charter schools. From the perspective that charter schools should invent entirely new and unique instructional methods, we did not see convincing evidence that charter schools accomplished this goal. This finding is not surprising, since school reformers in and out of charter schools have looked at the same body of literature that identifies the characteristics of effective curricula, methods, and schooling. Thus, we would expect to find charter schools experimenting with techniques and ideas that may have been implemented elsewhere. A more context-dependent definition of innovation, however, yields a different picture.

Our work indicates that it may be too early to accurately assess the types of teacher practices within charter schools. Many charter schools were at different stages of their experimentation and change processes. Some charter schools sought charter status to experiment with curriculum design, instructional programs, and professional development opportunities and succeeded in realizing this purpose. Others had been reforming these areas for years before becoming a charter school and used charter status to expand or continue these practices. Other charter schools articulated visions of new teaching techniques and curriculum in their charter petitions, but struggled to bring them to life within their classrooms. A few schools adhered to more traditional approaches to teaching, but argued that they had gained greater freedom to implement their educational program as they defined it.

In this chapter, we first examine professional roles and growth opportunities for teachers within charter schools. The remainder of the chapter focuses on the instructional programs: the use of standards, subject area emphases, delivery methods, teaching practices, home-based learning programs, and special education. Throughout the chapter, we draw on both survey and case study data.

Professional Roles and Opportunities

The role of the teacher

From virtually all perspectives in debates about education, the role of the teacher is considered to be critical. The training that teachers receive, the methods they use, and the workplace support provided to them have been the focus of educational reform efforts for years.

The roles of teachers in our case study sites varied, with most teachers taking on additional administrative or curricular responsibilities in their schools. Many charter school teachers saw themselves in distinctive roles—as academic "coaches" or facilitators in students' learning—especially if they were involved in home or independent study charter schools. At most of the schools we visited, teachers served on the school's governing body. Teachers in a few schools also served in an administrative capacity. For example, one teacher was also the Director of Curriculum and Instruction. In addition, some teachers participated on evaluation, curriculum, or other school committees and had taken on additional responsibilities, such as peer coaching and evaluation, developing schoolwide standards and assessments, and designing their schools' educational programs.

In some cases, these role changes may have produced negative effects. For example, teachers at several case study schools reported that teaching in charter schools required increased hours and work. Others noted a lack of clarity and confusion over their exact role and responsibilities. At other case study schools, teachers described more positive effects. Many teachers noted that they were more satisfied with these schools because they had more control over their own classrooms. These teachers thought they were better able to serve the needs of their students, many of whom had fallen through the cracks in the regular public school system.

In some of the case study schools, teachers did not appear to take on additional roles outside of the classroom. However, teachers at many of these schools reported an increased sense of ownership over the educational program. Teachers told us that they felt empowered and able to make more decisions. Charter school proponents expect that more enthusiasm and creativity in the classroom can contribute to an improved educational program.

Professional development and support

Professional development is considered to be a critical tool for enhancing teachers' knowledge and skills, informing them of new instructional and assessment methods, and building collaboration and a sense of professional community among colleagues. For most teachers throughout the country, professional development activities take the form of district-sponsored, 1-day workshops (Darling-Hammond, 1997). The majority of case study sites reported providing more appropriate professional development opportunities because these were determined on a schoolwide or individualized basis rather than being designed by the district. At times, teachers attended district- or county-run trainings or sessions, but most often they participated in opportunities provided by consultants, professional associations, or their own teaching staff.

Charter schools, for the most part, devoted a similar amount of time to professional development as other schools in California. Charter schools in the state, on average, had approximately five staff development days during the school year, as did regular public schools.[1] Our case study sites described a range of professional development opportunities for instructional staff. Only one of our case study sites did not provide (through either the school or the district) any formal staff development opportunities. Our case study sites most frequently reported professional development opportunities emphasizing literacy, standards, and assessment. Other topics reported by teachers were special education, math/science curriculum, technology, and brain research.

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[1] 1996-97 data for noncharter schools supplied by School Services of California, Inc.

Schools where parents or instructional aides had substantial instructional roles allowed all instructional staff to participate in these trainings, as opposed to just teachers. Three schools we visited had implemented a shortened school day for students every week to ensure that these staff development activities would occur on a regular basis. These shortened school days also enabled teachers to meet in small groups, usually as grade-level teams. Some respondents indicated that their charters enabled them to modify their weekly schedule to allow for these opportunities.

Teacher evaluation

Private-sector models (e.g., Total Quality Management), as well as many theories of teaching, rely on systematic performance evaluations for improving teacher accountability and practice. In the case of teachers, it is hoped that evaluations will change teachers' attitudes and behavior, which will ultimately translate into better classroom practices and improved student learning.

On the survey, nearly all charter schools (89%) reported having annual performance evaluations for teachers. However, in our case study schools, teacher evaluation systems had not yet been fully implemented. Although school directors reported that they evaluated teachers, most seemed to do so informally. Only 4 of the 12 sites we visited had a formal process for evaluating teachers. The evaluations at these four case study sites were based on observations (by principals and/or peers), professional portfolios, and/or peer review. For example, one school evaluated new teachers every 9 weeks for the first 2 years that they taught at the school. Each new teacher prepared a professional portfolio and discussed his or her performance regularly with the principal and a veteran teacher who was assigned to help in this process. Veteran teachers were evaluated by the principal every 2 years. Nearly all the schools that had not implemented an evaluation process for teachers reported that they were planning to do so.

Instructional Programs

Home-based learning and independent study programs

Traditional notions of schools define them as physical places where educators and students come together each day in an organized fashion to participate in learning activities. By changing the first part of this equation, home schools and independent-study programs dramatically alter traditional models of schooling. Charter schools based on home and independent study models are different from other charter schools and thus, by definition, are difficult to compare with other charter schools or regular public schools. These schools are based on school visions or philosophies that result in new structures and instructional delivery systems, but not always in innovative curricula. Home study charter schools are built on the idea that each family or student is responsible for developing an individualized learning plan. Student learning in these charter schools may occur at different times of day and in different locations. At times, the student may work individually, be taught one-on-one by a parent or a charter school teacher, or participate in small-group classes.

Our survey indicated that 29% of all charter schools employed home-based learning with the parent as primary instructor, and 22% employed independent study with the teacher as primary instructor. Many of these schools also reported using other instructional delivery methods, such as classroom instruction, as described later in this chapter. Three of our case study schools served students in these nontraditional educational settings or configurations. All of these schools' educational programs were characterized by an overarching philosophy of individualized, self-paced learning—which was seen as particularly relevant and effective for students who were not succeeding in the regular public schools. In addition, all of these schools offered a menu of programs based on different instructional delivery methods to meet the specific needs of their targeted student populations. However, only one site (described below) offered a markedly different or nontraditional curriculum.

One charter school we visited offered both home study and independent study programs, as well as small-class instruction. When a student enrolls in the school, the parent, student, and facilitator (or teacher) meet to determine the student's learning plan. At this point, the parent and the facilitator outline their roles—for example, the parent may decide to teach but the facilitator may determine the curriculum, or vice versa. Each student must demonstrate proficiency in different areas of learning to graduate from the program. This school's "curriculum" was the most unusual of these three case study sites. Depending on long-term plans and individual talents or interests of the student, the learning program may be based on a more traditional curriculum to enable the student to return to regular public school, or on a more creative curriculum to allow the student to learn thematically.

The second case study site based on home study also provided several options to students. The charter school operates two home study programs and a separate program for high-risk and frequently court-referred teenagers. This school also offers a parenting and academic program for pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers and an extended day program at elementary schools in its county. The unifying theme of these programs is that the school serves students and families who were not succeeding in or chose not to attend regular public schools. All of the curriculum is based on the sponsoring agency's standards-based curriculum to ensure that students are able to obtain credit for their work if they return to the regular public schools in the area.

The third charter school offered students either an independent study or daily classroom-based program. Upon enrollment, students were assessed to determine what competencies/credits they had mastered and what they still needed to graduate. Assessment results were used by the school staff to craft a set of projects or classes based on the students' needs. Students were allowed to move through either the independent study or classroom program at their own pace. In the daily classroom-based program, students could work on extra projects outside of class to earn extra credits and could also "test out" of certain classes by demonstrating mastery on various tests. The curriculum in this school was comparable to a more traditional independent study program. In fact, the textbooks used in this school were the same ones used in the district's alternative education program.

Several directors used their charter status to add structure and resources to their programs—features that were not present in noncharter independent study or home school programs. For example, the case study charter schools with home study programs offered electives in a classroom setting to support parents' efforts to educate their children, so that the students were exposed to courses that were taught in regular public schools. At one school, "instructional leaders" (who may or may not be credentialed teachers) offered elementary-level students electives in drama, Spanish, and science and offered high-school-level students electives in math and science, to name a few. The other school offered a range of classes taught by certified teachers, parents, or community members that focused primarily on art, music, and athletics, but also included high school math and English classes.

The structure provided by charter home and independent study schools is attractive to a certain population of students; all three schools had enrollments of more than 500 students. Remarks from a former home school parent at one charter school may provide insight into this appeal. The parent thought that having her children attend the charter schools provided the "best of both worlds"—not only was the learning program adapted to her children's skills and interests, but also she had the administrative and curricular support of a trained professional.

As the above examples illustrate, the charter vehicle has been used to create distinctive variations on the home school idea.

Standards and curriculum frameworks

At the local, state, and federal levels, efforts are under way to create meaningful standards by which to shape curriculum and instruction, and to evaluate its effectiveness. Reformers and policy-makers have introduced many such mechanisms over the past decade or so, including the federal Goals 2000 and the California Curriculum Frameworks.

In synch with this push toward standards-based reform, most case study charter schools recognized the importance of standards and high expectations for their students. Many of our case study schools reported that they followed the California Curriculum Frameworks as guides for curriculum and instruction. Several schools mentioned the use of district or county standards and curriculum guides. As mentioned above, one charter school's home study program followed the county's standards-based curriculum so that students who chose to reenter public schools later would be on track and receive credit for their home study coursework. Another charter school adopted the California Challenge District Standards and appointed teachers as "standards consultants" for the various disciplines. These consultants evaluated the appropriateness of different standards for use in the school, attended standards conferences, and continually engaged in regional and national discussions of standards.

A small group of charter schools developed—or were in the process of developing—their own standards for some or all disciplines. A few schools articulated "grade-level expectancies" for students and shared those documents with parents during open house or parent-teacher conferences. One charter school had developed content standards and curriculum guides for every grade level, which included monthly "benchmarks" or tasks. A home study charter school articulated learning goals or "growth areas" in which students must demonstrate competency. Over the years, the charter revised these goals and added specificity to each area. For example, one goal—*student reads and writes effectively*—was broken into subcategories, such as "student reads actively and derives meaning from written word," "student adjusts tone and style of writing for purpose and audience," and "student organizes ideas in a variety of ways." It is important to note that many of these schools had developed or started to develop these standards documents before gaining charter status. In sum, these standards-related practices, to varying degrees, reflect the educational and/or organizational missions of the charter schools.

Subject matter emphasis

Traditionally, schools teach to a range of areas of development that correspond to state or district curricular guidelines. For example, reading, mathematics, and language arts are the core subjects in most elementary schools. To find out the ways in which charter schools organized instruction, we asked directors in our survey to report on their emphases of subject matters. The majority of charter schools reported that their educational programs had equal emphases on all disciplines (71%). Some charter schools emphasized a particular subject area or discipline, such as technology (9%), English/language arts (9%), science (7%), and math (6%). Fourteen percent of charter schools reported an emphasis on other areas, such as vocational education, prevention of substance abuse, therapy, foreign languages, and character development.

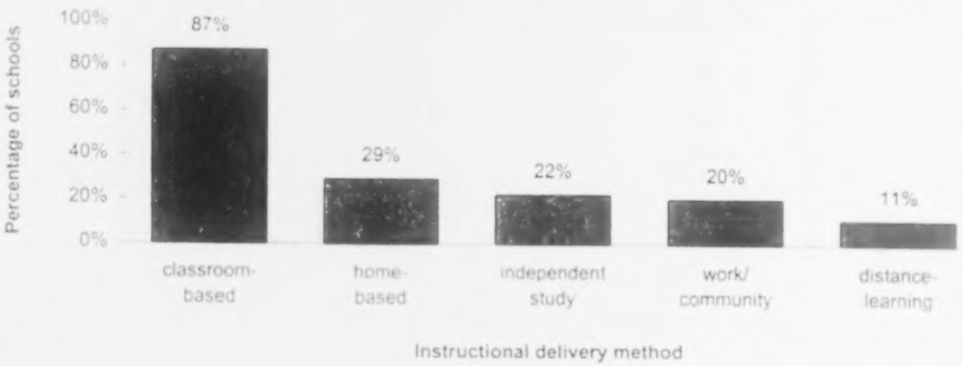
Although many of our case study charter schools provided an equal emphasis on all subject areas, several schools focused on 1 or two disciplines. These foci often drove how the school organized time, students, curriculum, and instruction. One school emphasized literacy and foreign language instruction and offered daily instruction in Spanish and English for all students (implementation began 1 year before the school's charter was granted). One charter high school implemented an international relations focus, requiring students to take an international relations course, geography, environmental science, and four years of a foreign language.

An elementary school serving a large LEP population emphasized literacy and language acquisition. Along with primary language instruction in the lower grades, the school developed a phonics-based language arts curriculum in both Spanish and English. Another elementary school offered an arts, technology, and science program one morning per week (e.g., we observed Bulgarian dance, introduction to drums from around the world, and problem-solving games in the computer lab). Finally, one school emphasized visual and performing arts.

Instructional delivery methods

Most schools use a classroom-based approach to delivering instruction—placing a teacher with a group of students for all or part of the day. Although 87% of charter schools responding to the survey reported using the more traditional, *classroom-based approaches*, many charter schools (48%) reported using more than one instructional delivery method.[2] Some charter schools also employed home-based learning with the parent as primary instructor, independent study with the teacher as primary instructor, work- and/or community-based learning, and distance learning. Figure IV-1 illustrates the primary instructional delivery methods used in

Figure IV-1: Charter Schools' Instructional Delivery Methods



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[2] Respondents were asked to check all primary instructional methods that applied.

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charter schools. Unfortunately, we do not have the data to allow for comparisons of instructional methods with noncharter public schools.

Comparisons among charter schools reveal interesting patterns of instructional delivery. Start-up charter schools were more likely to use home-based learning as a primary method (although not necessarily the primary method for the majority of students)—41% of start-up schools, compared with 17% of conversion schools. Similarly, rural schools implemented home-based learning more frequently than schools in other locations—69% of rural schools reported home-based learning as a primary instructional method, compared with 16% of urban schools, 22% of suburban schools, and 25% of small-town schools. Finally, large schools were more likely to have implemented distance learning as a primary instructional delivery method (24% of large schools, compared with 15% of medium/large schools, 9% of medium/small schools, and no small schools).

Classroom practices

Research suggests that teachers who emphasize meaning and understanding in their teaching are most likely to find ways of connecting instruction to students' home lives, thereby engaging students more successfully in academic learning and enabling them to perform better academically. Research also indicates that to support the expansion of teachers' instructional repertoires, there needs to be a balance among pressure for change in instructional practice, permission for professional autonomy, and provision of support (Knapp et. al., 1992). Sometimes, the use of various teaching and organizational practices—such as thematic and interdisciplinary instruction, team teaching, multi-age grouping, and uses of technology—can lead to the type of "teaching for meaning and understanding" and increases in teachers' "repertoires" that are supported by this research.

Although this study did not entail the collection of appropriate comparison data on classroom practices in noncharter public schools, we sought to determine whether case study charter schools were engaging in effective teaching practices. In our observations of classrooms, we found the implementation of these stated classroom practices to be uneven. At some schools, these practices appeared to be consistently implemented schoolwide. At other schools, they seemed to be more isolated within a select number of classrooms. At still other schools, we heard talk of such practices but did not observe them in action.

Thematic, Interdisciplinary Instruction. At its best, thematic, interdisciplinary instruction brings together curricula in several subject areas under the umbrella of one overarching concept or theme. Thus, teachers present a range of disciplines as an integrated whole instead of isolated, discipline-specific units—adding context and meaning to students' learning experiences.

At a few schools, we observed schoolwide implementation of integrated thematic curricula. In one elementary charter school, "families" from grades 1 through 6 gathered every other Friday to work on thematic units. Daily classroom lessons were also characterized by rich integration of multiple subjects. For example, we observed an integrated math and reading lesson in which the teacher read a book, *12 Ways to Get to 11*, then students worked through various problems that added to 11 and illustrated the problems with pictures and words. In another classroom at the same school, students worked on the building of an early New England village—a long-term project that integrated geometry, math, drawing, history, and natural science. On the day of our visits, students were developing plans for their houses and businesses, constructing budgets, building models, and using the metric system for measurements.

At another elementary school, we saw evidence of consistent use of thematic, interdisciplinary, and hands-on instruction: bulletin boards were rich with student-made projects and artwork; students were actively working with manipulatives, writing books, making models; and several activities we observed were student-centered (e.g., titles of projects on the wall included: "amazing alliterations all about us," "our priceless personalities"). One family of four classrooms was engaged in a thematic architecture unit. In language arts, they developed a glossary of architectural terms, read books on architects, and wrote research papers about a favorite architect. To tie in math, the students learned how to make scale drawings of their classroom and to measure large and small spaces. In addition, students took field trips to architecture landmarks and heard presentations from local architects. On the day of our visit, we observed students creating their "dream room." All four classrooms in this family showed signs of this architecture theme: walls were covered in related projects and materials, such as "what clues tell us why these buildings were built," and student drawings of cities accompanied by poems.

At other schools, we witnessed instances, but not schoolwide implementation, of thematic or integrated instruction. At one school, we observed a classroom that was engaged in interdisciplinary learning tied to a theme of oceans. Bulletin boards displayed student ocean haikus, paintings from a story about the sea, drawings of fish, and giant paper-stuffed whales. At the beginning of the observed lesson, students listened to a story entitled *See the Ocean*. After reading the story and briefly discussing the use of descriptive language, the teacher asked students to identify all five senses used to describe the ocean. To heighten their own senses, the teacher passed out apples and asked students to use their senses to describe them. At the end of the lesson, students were asked to create a "step book," using one page per sense to describe and illustrate the ocean (e.g., "I see . . ." "I feel . . ."). The use of integrated or thematic instruction was not evident in the few other observed classrooms at this school.

One charter school serving students who were not succeeding in traditional schools had originally stated goals of implementing technology and project-based and thematic learning. The school's director reported that this plan "fizzled" during the first few years of the charter and was something that they would like to build back up. Our classroom observations, although limited, indicated a high level of teacher-directed instruction. Another school talked a lot about thematic instruction and integrated curricula, but our observations failed to uncover examples of these methods inside classrooms.

Team Teaching. In its best form, team teaching allows teachers to share instructional responsibilities for the same group of students—allowing them to develop collegial relationships with their partners, plan together, experiment with student grouping strategies, and specialize in a more narrow range of topics. At a few charter schools we visited, teachers regularly co-taught or shared responsibility for teaching the same group of students. At one school, these "teaming" arrangements varied from grade level to grade level. In one cluster of three 1st-grade classrooms (which shared a large space), team teaching occurred for math, Spanish, and writer's workshop. During these rotations, each teacher took responsibility for one discipline. In the 4th grade, the four teachers rotated for writer's workshop, science, history/social studies, and Spanish. Teachers kept their own students for language arts and math.

At another school, team teaching occurred exclusively for mathematics. Students were grouped somewhat heterogeneously, although with less skill range (i.e., low-middle, middle-high) than a pure heterogeneous grouping. Each teacher took responsibility for a few units within the curriculum and then taught that unit twice. School administrators and teachers believed that this arrangement allowed teachers to specialize in certain strands of the curriculum and to develop rich units on a more manageable set of topics.

Student Groupings and Multi-Age Classrooms. As a teaching technique, student grouping allows teachers to tailor instruction more effectively to students' individual needs. For example, those using multi-age grouping strategies believe they can better adjust curriculum and instruction to students' developmental needs, which do not always correspond to the age-based grade-level groupings in most traditional classrooms.

Most charter school classrooms we visited experimented with a variety of student grouping strategies. We observed students working in small groups, individually, and with their entire class. Several schools also experimented with multi-age groupings. One small charter school organized all of its grade 5-8 students into three mixed-age groups, based largely on their math proficiency level. Students were grouped according to grade level for social studies in order to follow the state frameworks more closely. School staff viewed the multi-age grouping strategy as a critical element in their educational program—allowing more individualized and self-paced student learning.

Other schools experimented with a limited number of ungraded classrooms. One elementary school recently introduced a multi-age classroom of 60 students from grades 4-6. Students enrolled in the class by choice and were taught by two teachers and an instructional aide. To ensure coverage of the school's 4th-, 5th-, and 6th-grade curriculum, the class cycled through the curriculum for a different grade level each year (e.g., when we visited, the class work was comparable to the scope and sequence of the school's other 6th-grade classes).

Another elementary school recently created a K-2 class for at-risk LEP students. It was seen as a way to give better, more individualized attention to students struggling academically. This same school also implemented two multi-age classrooms with students from grades 1-5 that could not be placed in regular, single-grade classrooms. This grouping strategy did not appear to operate within an overarching pedagogical framework. Instead, it served more of an administrative need to preserve the 20:1 student-teacher ratio required to receive funding for the state class size reduction program.

Technology. Many educators believe technology is an effective tool for enhancing student engagement and learning. A few charter schools in our case study sample attempted to integrate technology into their core educational programs. In one, a computer and technology lab had state-of-the-art equipment for student-constructed multimedia presentations and Web pages. Home study students enrolled in the charter school had virtually unlimited access to the computer lab for coursework and other school projects. Students in the other charter programs also used the lab extensively. Another school implemented an unusually extensive array of technology throughout the school—a schoolwide network; multiple computers, printer, TV, and VCR in all classrooms; 5th-grade classrooms with one computer per child; a broadcasting room with video equipment; and voice amplification systems in classrooms.

At another school, technology was originally intended to play a large role but never became a reality. The only actual role it played was in assessing students. The school recently acquired a new computer-based tool that assesses student competency, creates lessons that students can perform on the computer, reassesses students at the end of the lesson, and generates pre-post comparisons. School staff were still developing this tool and used it primarily for remediation.

Conclusion

The complexity of the term "innovation" makes it difficult to comprehensively assess teaching and learning within charter school classrooms. For many schools, charter status was part of an evolution of reform—converting to a charter was viewed as the next step in improving the school's educational program. For other schools, charter status was seen as a means to create or experiment with an entirely new educational program. Yet, for others, charter status was directly related not to pedagogy or curriculum, but instead to organizational or managerial changes that, as they argue, create the potential for educational changes.

Thus, whereas some schools implemented creative and strikingly "different" teaching methods and professional opportunities, others claimed to be innovative in their newfound freedom to control their educational programs. One feature of teaching and learning that did stand out, however, was the unique configurations implemented at independent study and home-based learning charter schools.

Given the lack of appropriate comparison data, we were unable to evaluate fully the relative innovation within charter and noncharter schools. Although it is clear that many of the professional roles and teaching practices described in this chapter can be found in reform-minded, noncharter public schools, we do not know whether the implementation of these approaches differs in degree, kind, and quality. We believe that this is an area for future research. More broadly, future research can explore the nature of charter schools' educational programs—how they are formed, how clearly they articulate learning goals. Future research efforts can uncover how some charter schools are able to establish clear educational programs, and what can be done to help others do the same.

V. OUTCOMES OF CALIFORNIA CHARTER SCHOOLS

Any discussion of education in the 1990s includes some reference to outcomes. In the case of charter schools, the shift from rule-based to performance-based accountability is a direct reference to an emphasis on outcomes. As previous chapters have illustrated, charter schools vary considerably in virtually every descriptive category, including the goals they hope to achieve, the populations they serve, their governance structures, etc. Likewise, the variety of outcomes resulting from their efforts to increase student learning can be expected to be similarly broad in scope. To varying degrees, California's charter schools have instituted changes in many areas of school operations, including staffing, financial arrangements, curriculum and instruction, and parent involvement. Each of these changes can legitimately be considered outcomes at both the level of the individual charter school and the level of the charter school experiment as a whole. In this chapter, we focus on three important outcome areas: (1) progress toward charter goals, (2) parental involvement and perspectives, and (3) student achievement. The available data do not allow us to draw definitive conclusions about charters' performance in any of these areas, in part because it is too early in the reform process, and in part because the available data are insufficient. However, we are able to address the usefulness of each in considering the success of California's charter school experiment. For each of the outcome areas, we present some of the complexities of issues surrounding it, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of each in presenting a broad picture of California's charter schools. We rely on illustrative examples from survey and case study data to support our analyses. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the types of information that will be required for future research efforts.

Progress Toward Charter Goals

One way to address the outcomes issue is to look at the degree to which charter schools are meeting the objectives that they specified in their original charters. This approach is valuable for several reasons. First, it allows the school to be evaluated in terms of the entire range of objectives that it was seeking to accomplish, as opposed to focusing on one or two issues. For example, many charters directly propose changes in governance, staffing, parent involvement, curriculum and instruction, and student outcomes. A fair evaluation of the school should take each of these areas into account, particularly since progress across different outcome areas is likely to be uneven. Second, some objectives may be difficult to define or to achieve in a relatively short time. In this instance, there may be interim evidence of progress toward achieving the ultimate goals. For example, if a charter school identifies high levels of parent involvement as a goal, the creation of mechanisms to achieve it (e.g., site council, parent contracts) may constitute evidence of steps in that direction, even if the level of participation is not consistent with that specified in the charter. In addition, we found that some charters established very ambitious goals that may take considerable time to achieve—possibly more than the 5-year timeframe. Results that show improvement toward those goals can also be viewed as positive, if interim, outcomes. Third, such analyses have local relevance because the goals were established and pursued locally. Presumably, these results of the evaluation could be used in an ongoing fashion to improve the school and help to achieve its goals.

Our school survey did not specifically ask charter school directors to comment on their own system for assessing their progress toward their charters' stated goals. However, the survey indicated that charter schools engage in practices that would assist them in such efforts. First, the majority of charter schools reported that they collect and report a wide variety of data to sponsors, including student achievement, behavioral indicators, financial data, and parent satisfaction. Second, charter schools employ a wide range of strategies for the assessment of student learning. Third, nearly all charter schools reported that they systematically assess parent satisfaction through surveys and/or focus groups. Taken together, there is evidence that most charter schools collect information that would allow them to assess their progress. Charters approach this self-reflective task quite differently and situate themselves along a continuum from concrete and quantitative to informal and process oriented.

At one end of the continuum, several case study charter schools took a very concrete approach to addressing their progress toward their goals through the collection and analysis of data, and the documentation of those analyses in their annual reports or other formats. In its annual report, one school listed each of its objectives—a longer school year, parent involvement, teacher-parent governance, the creation of a preschool, the creation of a health clinic, racial balance, technology and arts foci, high expectations and achievement—and documented whether or not each objective had been reached over the course of the previous school year. In the cases where the goals had been achieved (e.g., parent involvement and governance), a detailed description of the process that brought the mechanisms into place and documentation of their effectiveness were provided (e.g., site council bylaws, participants' names, meeting schedules, decisions reached). In cases where the goals were not completely achieved (e.g., student achievement), an explanation of the results was included (e.g., program start-up with inexperienced teachers, testing schedule) with a prescription to remedy the problems in the following year (e.g., teacher inservice training). In other instances, the report identified some successes as well as challenges in meeting certain goals. For example, although computers had been purchased for all of the school's classrooms, not all the teachers had received sufficient training to make optimal use of them in their classes. Another school hired a third-party evaluator to look at a number of issues, including student achievement, mobility, program creation, fiscal autonomy and efficiencies—all objectives that were specified in its charter. This school's report also identified successes, challenges, and implications for action in successive years. The report documented a series of fiscal efficiencies that had been achieved and described the benefits of flexibility in staffing. In each of these schools, the breadth of the changes under way at the school level was particularly evident, as well as a diversity in the level of success that they had achieved in various outcome areas.

Several other schools we visited took a less formal approach to evaluating whether or not they were achieving their charter's objectives. In one of these schools, some of the charter goals were similar to those described above. At others, the charters were written by using broad language descriptive of the school, its environment, philosophy, and programs. One school produced an impressive book containing student illustrations, prose, and poetry. The staff viewed this publication and the well-attended performances held each semester as evidence that their work was succeeding in the spirit of the charter. At another school, our observations indicated that the school was using portfolio assessment and thematic instruction—in accordance with its charter—but did not document this fact in a systematic way for themselves or external parties.

It is important to stress two other factors related to progress toward charter goals. First, many of these charters were written in the early days of the law and few had experience writing or evaluating them. Second, many charter schools included goals in their charters that are difficult to measure. For example, many charter schools included goals such as the appreciation of cultural differences, the empowerment of staff and parents, stronger community ties, or improved social skills. Charter schools, like social scientists and anthropologists, had trouble documenting whether these goals had been achieved and the degree to which charter status itself contributed to their achievement. Our evidence in these areas relies on interviews with teachers and parents. In one school, teachers were articulate in speaking about the expansion of their roles in curriculum design and the creativity that they had been able to bring to the classroom. They were convinced that these changes were due to their charter status. In another school, the teachers were more mixed in their assessment both of how well the school was meeting its goals and whether charter status was central to the school's operation.

Parental Involvement and Perspectives

As we described earlier, there was a considerable presence of parents at many California charter schools. They played a variety of roles in support of day-to-day operations, the delivery of instruction, decision-making, and governance. This level of parent participation is consistent with many charter schools' stated objectives to increase the levels of parent involvement. This type of school-parent partnership is supported by a large body of research that shows that parent involvement is linked to a range of positive outcomes, including increased achievement and fewer discipline problems (Epstein, 1987; Comer, 1988). Also, unlike other alternatives of school choice, the impetus to create charter schools often comes from parents. For the purposes of evaluating the outcomes associated with the California charter school experiment, the parent perspective is additionally important because parents choose to send their children to charter schools, as opposed to other public schools. In this sense, parents "vote with their feet" so that their decisions to stay or to leave can be considered both independent of and in conjunction with other outcomes. These factors and the California charter law's intent to give parents and students expanded choices further document the importance of parents' views.

From this perspective, many California charter schools have achieved considerable success in the eyes of parents. According to our survey, 63% of schools reported having wait lists for entrance into their schools, and an additional 69% expected to increase enrollment in the coming year. These results suggest that most charters had strong local support among people whose children would be most affected by the pros and cons of the schools' programs. This is an especially important finding in the range of outcomes associated with charters.

At most of our case study sites, we asked parents to reflect on whether the school's charter status had made a difference for them and their children. Their responses depicted a positive and complicated view of parent involvement. At one school where parents served in both support roles for the day-to-day operations of the school and on the school's governing board, parents were pleased with the opportunity to be included in the decision-making processes regarding the hiring of instructional staff, purchasing of materials and supplies, and general school policies. These parents linked this level of engagement directly with the school's charter status, citing precharter and other public school experiences as counterexamples to make their point. At a second school, parents were also very supportive of the school but were frustrated by some of the policies and control of the board. Nonetheless, they were supportive of the school because they felt that they could directly approach the instructional staff with their concerns and that they would be heard and given appropriate attention. They also cited the potential for change and accommodation that would not be present elsewhere. In both of these cases, parents supported the schools and intended to keep their children in attendance.

Student Achievement

As stated earlier, the appropriate data are not currently available with which to draw conclusions about student achievement in California charter schools. However, in its very first provision, the 1992 California Charter Schools Act states that charter schools are ultimately intended to improve student learning. Indeed, the regulatory freedom enjoyed by charter schools is predicated on fulfilling that promise. However, the language in the legislation is sufficiently general that it can be nearly universally supported. There is also agreement on broad goals such as the need to teach students to be able to compete in the economy of the next century, or to teach students to gain problem-solving and teamwork capabilities. However, disagreements arise quickly when the discussion turns to the specific educational contexts and activities that are intended to achieve such important goals. The debate can become even more complicated when the achievement of these objectives must be demonstrated empirically. In short, neither the state of California nor the nation's larger educational community as a whole have been able to agree on specific definitions of academic achievement or on how it should be measured. California charter schools find themselves in the middle of this debate. This diversity of assessment practices, philosophies, and available data—either from the state or what we were able to collect from schools—has led us to conclude that a simple answer to the question "are students performing better in charter schools?" is not currently attainable. Although the lack of statewide data is problematic, the controversy surrounding complicated issues related to the appropriateness of various approaches, comparison groups, and timeframes are likely to continue once data become available.

In this section, we first explain why data are not available at the time of this report. Next, we present a discussion of overarching philosophical and practical issues relating to achievement and the types of assessment used in charter schools. We continue with an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of different assessment strategies for making charter-noncharter comparisons. Finally, we present four examples from survey and case study data to illustrate some of the complexities of different perspectives on standardized test scores.

Why aren't data available?

There are a number of reasons that data are not available to allow conclusions to be drawn regarding the performance of charter schools in comparison with other public schools. First, the repeal of the California Learning Assessment System (CLAS) left the state without a statewide testing program. Second, many charter schools did participate in the Pupil Testing Incentive Program (PTIP), the data for which were collected by the California Department of Education in the spring of 1997. However, those data were not available for analysis within the time line of the interim study. Third, our charter school survey indicated that a large majority of schools used standardized tests to measure student performance. However, the survey asked for achievement data from a single year (1995-96) and from specific grade levels (4, 5, 8, and 10). Some newer charter schools did not have achievement data for that year, and others just began using tests this past school year (1996-97). Others may not have had the types of scores for the grades we requested (i.e., percentiles or Normal Curve Equivalents). In short, only 30% of the schools were able to provide test scores on the survey. Fourth, we sought to collect data from schools, sponsoring districts, and comparison schools at each of our case study sites. We were able to obtain aggregated data from 8 of the 12 sites but do not have student-level data from any of them. Thus, we are able to use these data as examples to illustrate the complexities associated with the achievement questions, but these comparisons cannot be extrapolated to all charter schools in California.

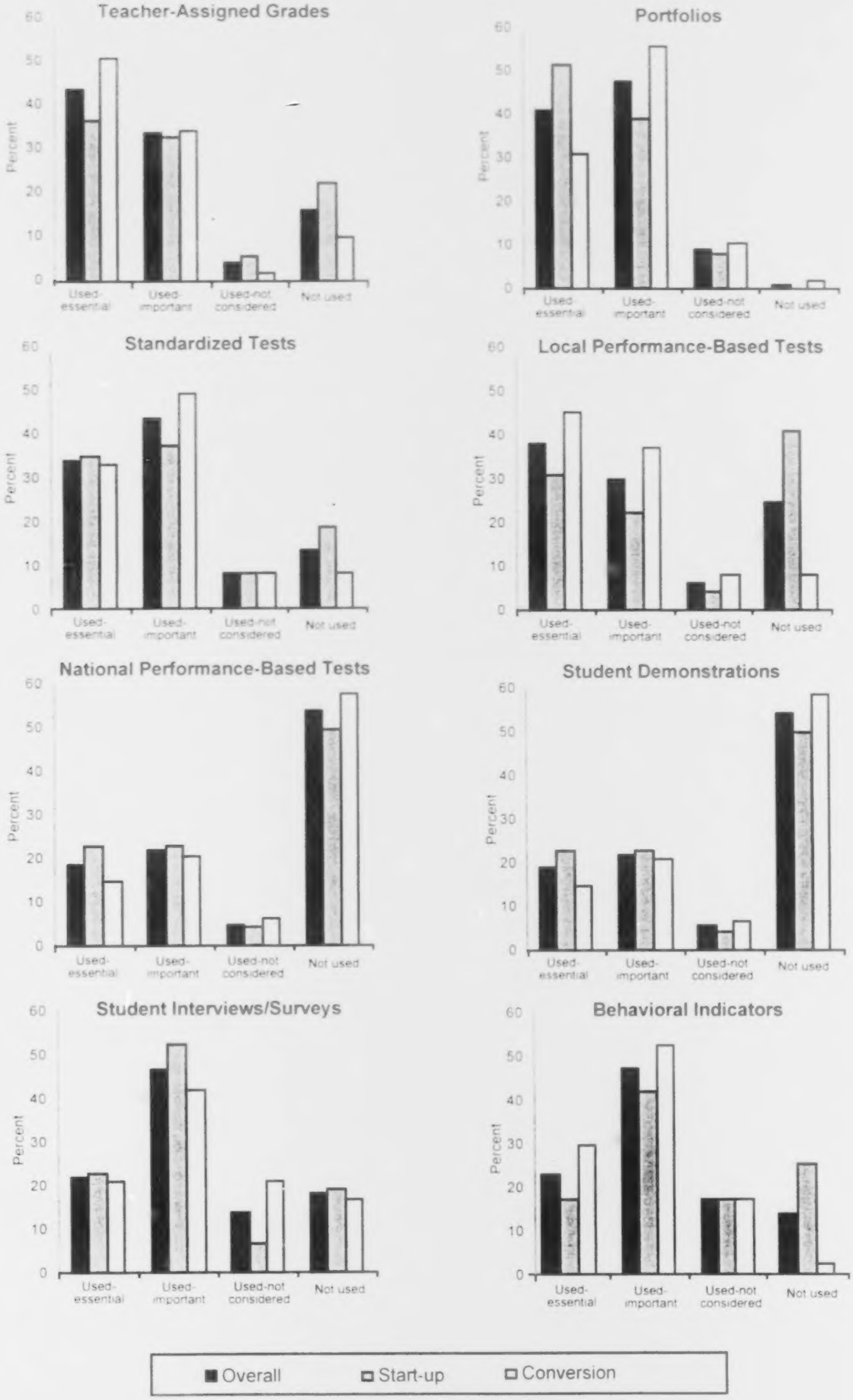
Philosophical and practical issues

As described earlier, charter schools in California vary greatly in size, target populations, instructional delivery methods, and long-term goals. The same is true when it comes to the assessment of student learning. Philosophically, some charter schools view standardized tests as the best measure of their school's performance in comparison with other public schools. Other schools view these tests as necessary to convince opponents of their effectiveness, even if they believe that they are not the best way to measure student performance. Still others abhor such tests on the grounds that they do not measure true student abilities and may even be injurious to children. Our survey of charter school directors assessed both schools' use of different assessment approaches and the importance of each in assessing student performance at their schools. Schools were asked to report whether they felt that each technique was *essential*, *important*, *used but not considered*, or *not used* to assess student performance (Figure V-1). The figure shows that charter schools employed a great variety of methods in assessing students' performance. Overall, schools considered the use of both traditional teacher-assigned grades and alternative assessments, such as portfolios and locally developed performance-based tests, to be essential or important to their assessment of student progress.

Standardized tests and local performance-based tests were also used, but were less frequently considered to be essential or important. Other approaches, such as the use of behavioral indicators and student interviews, were also important. It is equally important to note that some common assessment approaches were not used at all by some charter schools. Fourteen percent of charter schools reported that they did not use standardized tests, and 17% did not use teacher-assigned grades. The majority of schools did not use national performance-based tests.

The start-up vs. conversion charter school distinction had relevance for the use of assessment approaches. Start-ups were more likely than conversions to employ portfolio assessment methods as an essential part of their assessment strategies, whereas conversions were

Figure V-1: California Charter Schools' Strategies for Assessing Student Learning



more likely to view teacher-assigned grades as essential. Both types of schools were comparable in their use of standardized tests. It is possible that start-up charter schools favored less traditional forms of student assessment. This possibility has implications for our ability to compare student performance in some charters with that in other charter schools or in noncharter public schools.

Schools that did administer standardized tests—whether they felt it was an essential or important component of their assessment system or whether they did not consider it in assessing student performance—used a variety of different instruments (see Table V-1). Their variety of different tests notwithstanding, the use of these tests remains controversial because of disagreements about their validity and equity for all students. Finally, it is also important to note that these debates regarding assessment and measurement are not unique to charter schools and are often topics of discussion in public school settings. Thus, differences may be more a matter of degree than of kind.

Table V-1

ILLUSTRATIVE STANDARDIZED ACHIEVEMENT TESTS USED BY CALIFORNIA CHARTER SCHOOLS

Adult Basic Learning Examination (ABLE)
APRENDA
California Achievement Test (CAT)
Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS)
Individual Test of Academic Skills (ITAS)
Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)
Kaufman Achievement Test
Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA)
Stanford Achievement Test (SAT)
Terra Nova
Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE)
Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT)

Assessment Approaches for Charter-Noncharter Comparisons

As described above, California charter schools used a variety of approaches to the assessment of student learning. In terms of addressing the issue of whether students attending California charter schools learn more or better than students in other public schools, each type of assessment has both strengths and weaknesses. Below we describe the pros and cons associated with five primary methods for comparing charters and noncharters.

Statewide assessment

Even though universal agreement on content or process is unlikely, a statewide assessment in which all students in California participate would serve as a reasonable way to compare students in charter schools with peers in public noncharter schools. We should note, too, that at the time the legislation was passed, the now canceled California Learning Assessment System (CLAS) was still under development. Many charters, like other schools, had planned to use this assessment as one of their primary assessment tools, as described in their charter applications. The cancellation of the CLAS left those charters without clear evaluation plans. Recent passage of the Statewide Testing and Reporting Program (STAR) and adoption of a common standardized test to be used throughout the state (Harcourt Brace's Stanford Achievement Test [SAT-9]) by the State Board of Education will provide useful data in addressing the question of student learning in charter schools. It will still take several years of administering the same test statewide before analyses comparing relative growth of charters and noncharters will be possible.

Portfolios and demonstrations

The use of portfolio assessments is increasing generally, and many charters use such methods. Portfolios are showcases of actual student work (e.g., reports, projects) collected over time. Portfolios have several advantages over other assessment approaches. They document students' actual work in the context in which it occurs rather than paper and pencil tests that measure a skill compared with an external standard. Thus, portfolio assessment methods are effective tools for showing both the process behind learning and its final product. Further, portfolios are especially congruent with the educational philosophies espoused by many charter schools. As such, it would be reasonable to judge charter schools by employing an assessment system that they value. However, for the purposes of assessing whether or not students in charter schools learn more or better than other public school students, portfolios also have some significant problems. First, although it is technically possible to do so, portfolios are not designed to be easily aggregated and compared across schools. Variation in their implementation, as well as likely differences in their content, would make such comparisons expensive and possibly inconclusive. Finally, comparisons of charter schools that rely solely on portfolio assessment with noncharter schools that do not are impossible.

Standardized tests

As documented above, a great variety of standardized tests are available that are designed to measure academic achievement. All of these have been designed to meet psychometric standards through statistical analyses of their validity and reliability. National comparisons are possible because there is a nationally representative norm group who have taken the test and against whom students' scores can be compared. These tests typically have sections that correspond to traditional content areas, such as reading, math, and language arts. These assessments have several advantages for comparing charters with other schools. They provide a national yardstick against which to evaluate student performance that is presumably similar for charter and noncharter students. They are also quite common and relatively inexpensive. Some charters are eager to compare their students' performance on standardized tests with those of other public schools as a way of demonstrating the competitiveness of their approaches.

However, there are significant problems associated with these tests for comparative purposes, as well. Some argue that the tests overemphasize product over process, rely on artificial testing situations to test skills out of context, and correlate to strong test-taking skills rather than to actual student learning. Although Normal Curve Equivalents (NCEs) are intended to allow cross-test comparisons, there will always be some question about whether or not the assessments address the same underlying constructs. For example, whether the Spanish-language APRENDA and the English-language CTBS are directly comparable remains a question.

These tests are likely to continue as one important way to compare charter and noncharter performance. However, our analyses have demonstrated that specific types of analyses and comparison groups can lead to somewhat different conclusions. Thus, when appropriately used, such tests can play a part in a comprehensive strategy for comparing charter and noncharters.

Teacher-assigned grades

The grades that teachers give children have historically been a major part of the assessment of student performance. They continue to play an important role, particularly in communicating to parents about student progress. The advantage of using such measures for comparison is that their familiarity to most of the population allows them to be readily understood. Further, since both charters and noncharters make extensive use of this system, it would seem logical to use grades as an approach to comparison. The disadvantages, however, are also significant. There is little standardization of grading practices across teachers, schools, and districts. Some schools use different measurement scales. Others do not use grades at all. Thus, although useful in a descriptive sense, teacher-assigned grades may not yield conclusive data on the effectiveness of charter schools.

Behavioral indicators

Behavioral indicators such as attendance, suspensions, and expulsions are good measures of student engagement in school. Student engagement is essential to success in any educational institution. Certainly, if students are not physically present at the school, they will not have the opportunity to learn. Thus, the importance of these measures must not be underestimated. Indeed, many charter schools cite such measures when referring to the success of their programs (e.g., reduced absenteeism). These measures are also available for both charter and noncharter schools, so comparisons between the two are relatively easy. As is the case with teacher-assigned grades, however, there are significant differences across school districts in the criteria that are used, as well as the data collection systems designed to track them. Further, important as they are, these indicators may or may not be good proxies for student learning. We believe that behavioral indicators should be used in conjunction with other methods, rather than be the sole basis for judging student progress.

Illustrative Examples of Student Achievement at Case Study Schools

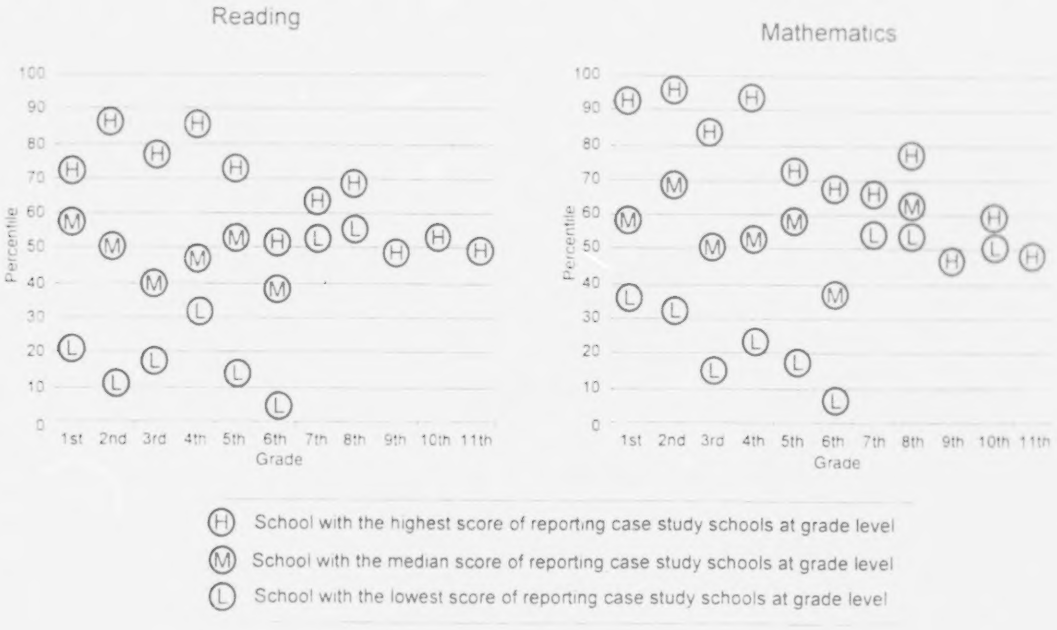
Once a particular assessment approach is chosen, conceptual and methodological issues continue to complicate the interpretation of the data and can yield different answers depending on how the question is framed. Further, there are often alternative explanations of the results that may or may not have anything to do with charter schools per se. In the examples below, we rely on standardized test scores provided to us by schools and districts for these comparisons to illustrate the complexity of the task at hand. They address, in different ways, the following issues. First, even once a metric for comparison has been established, there remains the additional problem of choosing the appropriate comparison group. There are many ways that students can be sorted and compared, including with students from the state, the school district, or demographically similar schools. Second, should averages of single points in time be considered, or is growth in student performance over time more appropriate? Each of these decisions has implications for the conclusions that ultimately might be reached regarding student learning. Furthermore, precise analyses would require that data be available at the individual student level for charters and noncharters and include appropriate control variables, such as socioeconomic status, parental educational attainment, etc. Unfortunately, such data were not available. However, we have created four different scenarios based on school-level data that provide different perspectives on these issues. Note that these analyses are intended to illustrate the complexities associated with different types of approaches and are based on a very limited number of schools. They should not be extrapolated to all charter schools.

National statistics

One way to evaluate the performance of charter schools is to compare their performance on standardized tests with national averages. This approach has some attractive features. It can show how students in charter schools compare with very large numbers of students at the national level. The data to make these comparisons are readily available. However, such comparisons are generally misleading because the student population of any particular school is generally very different from the national average on academically important issues, such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, etc.

Figure V-2 depicts high, low, and median average percentile scores in reading and mathematics across a range of grade levels of case study charter schools for which data were available. The figure shows substantial variation in performance. The school with the highest test scores was well above the national average indicated by the 50th percentile. Another school had scores well below national averages. The median scores fell between the 40th and 60th percentiles. Beyond the wide range in achievement, there are a number of possible ways to

Figure V-2: High, Low, and Median Average Standardized Test Scores for Reporting Case Study Charter Schools

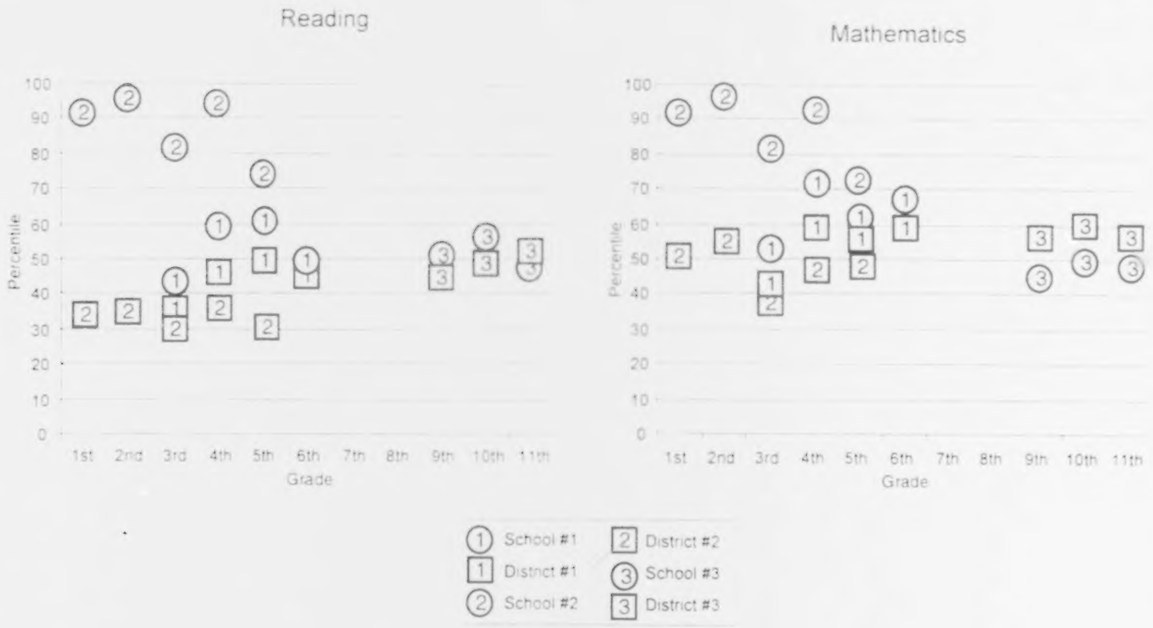


interpret the differences in these schools. For example, one might argue that the high-scoring school was the most successful because of its relatively high scores in comparison with national norms. However, it is also plausible that there were other differences between the schools that explain the results, and these differences may or may not be related to charters per se. For example, the charter school with high scores was located in a community where the other public schools also perform well compared with national norms. Further, the lower-performing charter school had low scores in comparison with the nation, but may have higher scores than other public schools that serve demographically and economically similar communities. Also, analyses at a single point in time such as this do not show whether student achievement has changed since the schools became charters (in the case of conversions). Thus, although comparisons with national norms such as these are useful, it is essential to remember that they do not account for differences in population demographics or for school performance prior to charter status.

District comparisons

An alternative to comparing charter school students with a national norm is to evaluate student performance against indicators from the sponsoring school district. This approach is attractive because the results can have greater local relevance and the students in charters and noncharters may be drawn from the same community. Access to qualified staff and other community resources are presumably more comparable at the district than at the national level. On the other hand, a significant disadvantage arises in very large districts that have large amounts of diversity within them. In such school districts, schools can depart from each other demographically as dramatically as is possible in national comparisons. Again, it would be possible to make statistical comparisons that control for differences in demographics or other characteristics between charters and their sponsoring district. Such analyses would require that data be available at the individual student level or from a relatively large number of schools. The study schedule precluded our gaining access to such data in the course of this study. Instead, we had to compare districts with schools by using aggregated data. Figure V-3 depicts the performance of three charter schools in comparison with their sponsoring district averages on standardized tests of reading and mathematics. In one case, School #2 exceeded the district average considerably (nearly 50 percentage points) at each grade level. In the case of School/District #1, the performance of students in these schools was similar, favoring those in the charter school in all but one grade level. The opposite conclusion holds for School #3, whose scores were close to but below the district average at all of the grade levels tested. These interpretations would be reasonable as long as one can assume that the background

Figure V-3: Reported Average Standardized Test Scores for Case Study Charter Schools in Comparison with Sponsoring School District Averages



characteristics of students at the school and those of the district overall are similar.[1] This assumption is probably tenable in districts that serve communities that are comparatively homogeneous with respect to demographics. However, many districts have significant diversity in them such that district totals may not represent any individual school very well. Thus, in the absence of student-level data where differences in socioeconomic and ethnic differences can be statistically controlled, comparisons between charter schools and their sponsoring district averages are most useful where the charter school and the district are most likely to have similar demographic characteristics.

Comparable-school comparisons

A still more precise comparison is to evaluate charter school performance in light of individual schools that serve similar populations in terms of grade levels served, socioeconomic status, ethnic group membership, and other community characteristics. At each case study site, we asked schools and school districts for nominations of schools that would resemble their charter school on those dimensions. Figure V-4 depicts standardized test scores in reading and mathematics by grade level for three case study charter schools and those of their nominated comparison schools. These results can be interpreted in a number of ways. School #5 had higher test scores than any of the comparison schools for each grade with data available, and in both reading and math. In contrast, School #4 had high test scores relative to the nation but lower test scores than its comparison school, with the exception of 5th grade. The story is different for each school. School #1 posted scores in comparison with three other schools in the district. Depending on grade level, its scores were either the first or second. By contrast, School #4 had generally high scores in comparison with national norms, but was below its comparison school at most of the grade levels. School #5, on the other hand, had higher scores than all its comparison schools in years that data were available. So, although both Schools #4 and #5 had similar performance in comparison with the national norms, they had precisely opposite relationships to their comparison schools. The major weakness of this analysis is the potential for bias in the process of nominating comparison schools. Again, individual student-level data would allow for the selection of comparison schools based on statistical criteria.

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[1] In the remaining sites, either data were not available to make such comparisons or the nature of the school's program would make comparisons impossible.

Within-school comparisons

It is reasonable to make the argument that the most appropriate metric for assessing charter schools, or any other school for that matter, is the change in its performance over time. If a school continues improving from year to year, that may be as important as—or more important than—how it compares with other schools or national norms. There are disadvantages to this approach as well, however. Comparisons over time assume that the tested population is fairly stable. This may not be the case with some schools, charter and noncharter alike. Figure V-5 depicts test score data for three case study schools from the years when data were available between 1993-94 and 1996-97. As was the case in achievement viewed from other perspectives, student performance varied considerably over time. In one case, the charter school had marked improvements in one or both subject areas for most of the grade levels for which there were data (School #6). This school actually showed more growth than other schools that exceeded the national average to start (e.g., School #1). For School #3, there were improvements in some grade-level scores over time and losses in others. This approach to comparison again produces mixed results, with some charters improving over time while others remain flat. This result emphasizes the need to look at achievement data from a number of perspectives in order to gain a complete picture. One perspective in and of itself does not tell the entire story.

Figure V-4: Examples of Average Standardized Test Scores of Selected Case Study Charter Schools and Local Comparison Public Schools

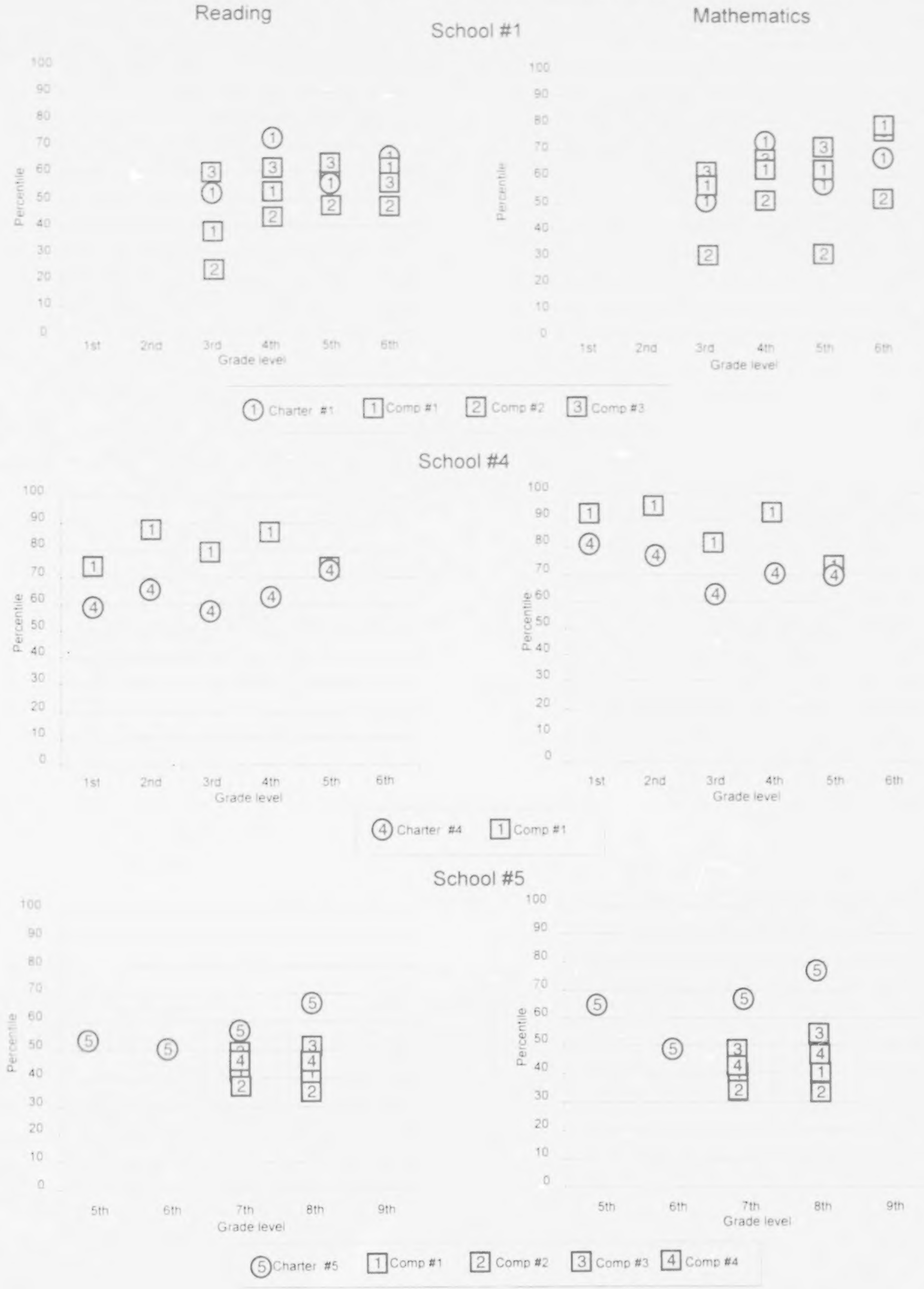
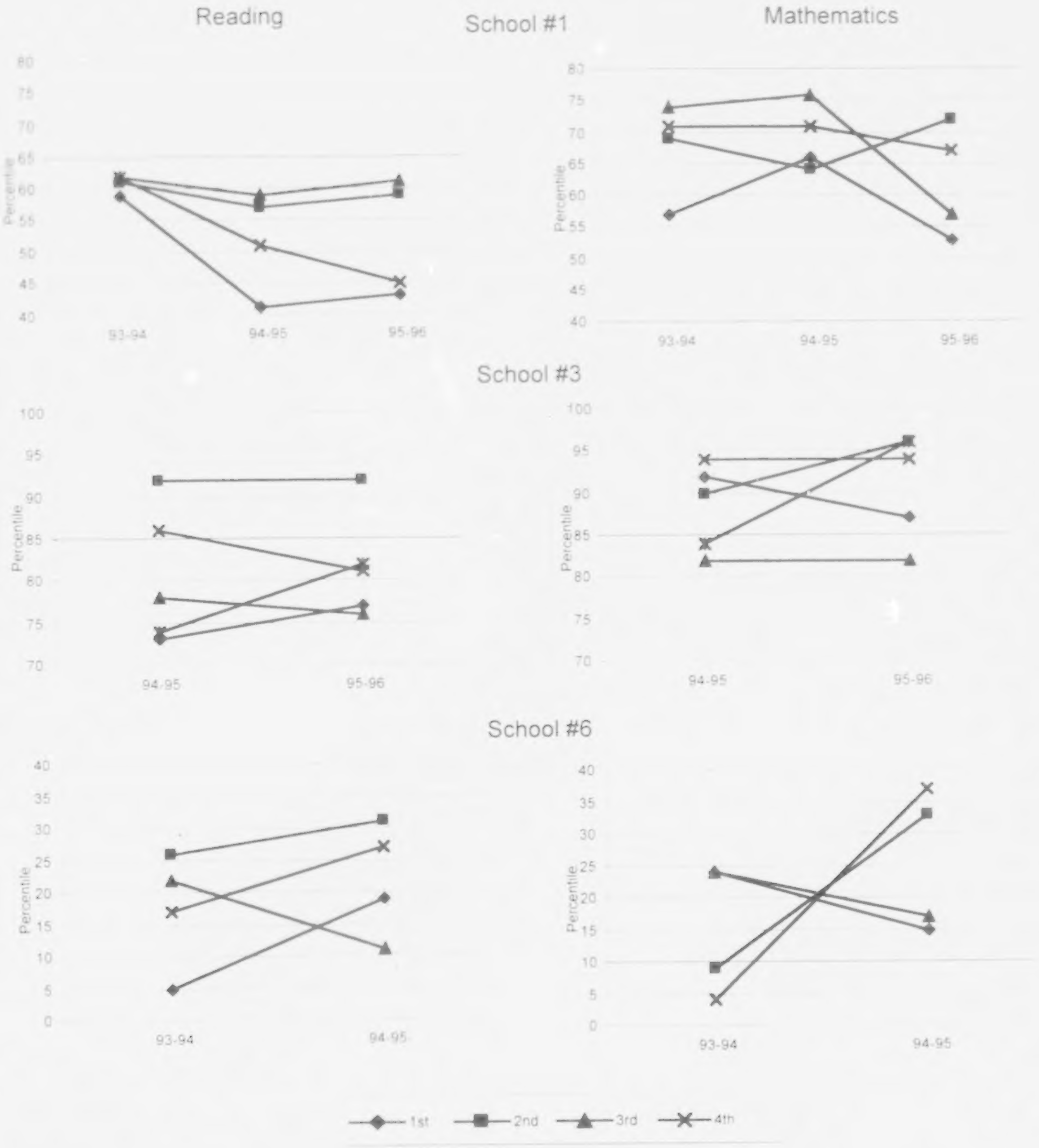


Figure V-5: Average Standardized Test Scores for Selected Case Study Charter Schools, by Grade Level from 1993-94 through 1995-96



Conclusion

The philosophical and appropriate-comparison issues related to charter school performance remain significant and will continue to be a subject of debate. However, several important points can be made. First, a broad view of outcomes suggests that many charters are attaining many of goals they set for themselves. Further, some are clearly working toward their goals and have established processes to evaluate their progress. Others are having difficulty because of goals that are vague and/or difficult to measure. Second, the popularity of charters among parents indicates that charters provide a valuable alternative to public schools. Third, in the area of student achievement, available data do not allow for conclusions to be drawn. However, our case study examples illustrate that conclusions on student learning questions are based, in part, on the way the questions are framed. Questions related to the instrument selected as a metric, which group charters should be compared, and over what period of time all affect the conclusions one might reach. These results can contribute to both data collection and analytic discussions for the statewide testing in 1998 and beyond. In our opinion, future research should be multimethod and investigate the dimensions of student learning that are especially suited to charters. Further, it should seek to establish which types of educational programs are most effective and/or more likely to occur in charter schools.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this report, we describe the characteristics of charter schools in California and discuss their operation as charter entities. A challenge for the research team throughout the study has been to understand and account for the diversity of charter schools on every dimension, including student and community demographics, classroom learning, administrative relationships, and student outcomes. Although we have been able to glean general characteristics that are common to charter schools, our fieldwork has demonstrated that each charter school is a unique educational organization.

In this concluding chapter, we summarize the key findings from the preceding chapters. We also present recommendations for the charter school law that are based on our analyses of the study data. We conclude the chapter with recommendations for further research. The following are what we see as the major lessons learned.

Summary of Findings

- **Charter schools varied widely on many variables studied.** Some key dimensions that divided the universe of charter schools into useful analytical categories were start-up versus conversion schools, home-based versus classroom-based instruction, grade levels served, student enrollment, type of community (e.g., urban, rural), and degree of control over the school budget. In many of the preceding discussions of our data, these distinctions were useful for making meaningful statements about the characteristics of charter schools. Overall, the most striking differences were between start-up and conversion schools—each representing approximately half of the population. Start-up charter schools were smaller, more often enrolled students from a wide geographic area, and served more nontraditional grade ranges (e.g., grades 5-8). Compared with conversion charter schools, start-up charter schools were more likely to be financially autonomous, to have instructional staff without union representation, and to have fewer traditional contract provisions for instructional staff (e.g., tenure). Start-ups served lower percentages of special education and LEP students than did conversion schools. At the same time, they reported, on average, enrolling more low-achieving students than did conversion schools.
- **Charter schools differed from noncharter public schools on key factors.** Many charter schools enrolled students who lived outside of sponsoring district boundaries. Charter schools served all grade levels, often in nontraditional grade-level groupings. On average, they were smaller than noncharter schools in the state. Charter schools reported high levels of parent participation and often required parents to commit to certain levels and types of participation.
- **Statewide, charter schools were similar to the state average on key student and teacher characteristics.** Charter schools in California served percentages of low-

income, special education, and LEP students similar to the state average. Languages spoken by students in charter schools were similar to those spoken by students statewide. Starting teacher salaries in charter schools were consistent with the state average. Overall, teachers in charter schools had an ethnic composition similar to that of teachers statewide. Nearly two-thirds of charter schools reported that some or all instructional staff were members of unions or other bargaining units.

- **Differences and similarities between charter and noncharter schools sometimes depended on the level of analysis.** For example, within their own school districts, charter schools tended to enroll relatively more White students and relatively fewer Hispanic students than noncharter schools. Statewide, however, charter schools and noncharter schools served ethnically similar student populations.

- **Most of our comparisons of charter and noncharter student outcomes yielded inconclusive results.** Comparable student outcome data between charter schools and the noncharter schools in their sponsoring districts and counties were hard to find, in most cases. Even when we did find such data, the data did not allow us to determine the relative academic performance of noncharter schools. There were many explanations for these circumstances: the absence of a statewide assessment system during the life cycles of charter schools that are currently operating, varying philosophies about and approaches to measuring student achievement, and the lack of consistent approaches by sponsoring agencies in monitoring student outcomes at charter schools. Of course, these challenges are not unique to charter schools. However, the political stakes are higher for charter schools if charters are revoked or the experiment ends because of inconclusive indicators of student performance in charter schools.

- **Charter schools were not created in a vacuum.** As we learned from our case study sites, charter schools cannot be viewed in isolation from state and local reform efforts, from the communities within which they operate, or from the politics of their sponsoring agencies (school districts, county offices of education, and the state). In the case of conversion schools, there were also educational and organizational legacies from their precharter incarnations. Motivations to establish charter schools always occurred in the context of existing institutional arrangements or in reaction to them. Different sets of stakeholders had opinions about charter school practices at the individual school level, as well as about state and district policies and practices. Certain charter schools and charter school practices drew opposition from certain collective bargaining interests with concerns about job security and other teacher rights. Some community groups opposed charters as too selective in student admissions.

- **Educators in charter schools have approached teaching, learning, and professional development in numerous ways.** Charter schools in California are intended to "encourage innovative teaching methods," in addition to other goals (Education Code 47601). There are as many interpretations of this objective as there are charter schools, which makes it difficult to characterize all of their instructional programs and goals for students and teachers. Charter schools employed multiple instructional delivery methods (e.g., home study, classroom, and distance learning), sometimes within the same school. In many of our case study schools, it was difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle what innovations, if any, were due to their charters, especially in conversion schools with extensive reform histories. Many instructional practices we observed were clearly possible outside the charter framework, a fact that many educators in charter schools also realized.

- **Parent participation was often very extensive in charter schools.** Parent participation is not unique to charter schools, but many charters publicized high expectations for parent involvement in school programs, and the majority of these schools reported high levels of involvement by parents. Sometimes, these expectations were enforced by mandatory parent contracts that specified parent roles and responsibilities. Parents were involved in many facets of charter schools: governance and decision-making, classroom instruction, fundraising, and working with their children at home (especially in home study programs).

- **Few charter schools had financial independence.** Financial independence is permitted by the charter school legislation, but few charter schools have achieved it. In most charter schools, finances were at least partially controlled by the sponsor, although start-up schools were more likely to have financial autonomy than were conversion schools. The financially autonomous schools we studied reported that they realized significant cost savings by controlling their own budgets.

  Charter schools had varying degrees of interest in having financial autonomy. Several school leaders in our case study schools did not want to take on the added responsibility of managing school finances. Many leaders questioned the viability of being financially independent, since it is challenging, if not impossible, for most charter schools to cover facilities costs without help from the sponsor or an outside agency. On the other hand, a number of charter schools were not granted as much financial independence as they would have liked.

- **Sponsoring agencies held charter schools accountable for their fiscal operations more systematically than for their educational outcomes.** The political and educational appeal of charter schools was the "change from rule-based to performance-based accountability" (Education Code 47601[f]) in schools that were expected to be granted autonomy within the public school system. Yet it was not always clear who was or should have been monitoring the school and student outcomes and other educational goals of the charter. In some cases, this lack of oversight was due to indifference by the sponsoring agency or the fact that the district was not accustomed to monitoring academic progress at individual schools. It appeared that some schools and sponsoring agencies intended to defer these accountability questions until charter renewal. In contrast to educational accountability, fiscal oversight by sponsoring agencies appeared strong.

Recommendations

A charge of this study was to make recommendations on whether the Legislature should expand, modify, or terminate the charter school approach. Several issues emerged during the course of the study that lead us to recommend a number of modifications. The proposed modifications address ambiguities in the charter legislation that concern serving students with special needs, the ethnic diversity of students, and liability. They are highlighted in the bullets that follow.

- **Address how charter schools must comply with special education regulations.** Serving students with special needs is an area marked by uncertainty for many charter schools and sponsoring agencies. This uncertainty came through most clearly around the issue of special education. Enrollment of special education students in charter schools was comparable to that in the statewide school population (8% and 9%, respectively). However, charter schools in our case study sample had little, if any, awareness of how their educational program and the waivers of the charter school law meshed with federal special education laws and regulations. Even many of the schools that provided special education services through their sponsors were not involved in the special education referral, assessment, and placement process. Charter schools reported a lack of information from the California Department of Education about their responsibilities regarding special education. Even though charter schools may adequately serve special-needs students without providing special education services, the state must address how charter schools are supposed to comply with special education regulations.
- **Resolve the contradiction between ethnic balance in charter schools and neighborhood preference.** There is a contradiction between the requirement that charter schools enroll a student body with an ethnic distribution of students that matches that of the district as a whole and the requirement that conversion charter schools give preference to children in the attendance area of the preconversion school. It may not be possible for neighborhood conversion schools to meet both requirements in a large, diverse school district with concentrations of students from different ethnic groups, or in schools that draw students from multiple school districts.
- **Clarify legal and fiscal liability issues** by including a definitive assignment of charter school responsibility in the Education Code. We found that concerns about their own liability kept some sponsors from loosening their control of charter schools. Several sponsors reported that their belief that they would ultimately be held liable for charter schools' financial or educational failure discouraged them from giving charter schools more freedom. Sponsor liability remains a large gray area in charter legislation. (Liability concerns also stalled the state's direct funding pilot.) The recent CDE recommendation to the State Board of Education that charter schools and their sponsor agencies determine financial dependence or independence may help clarify this issue (California Department of Education, 1997b, p. 2). This and CDE's other

recommendations on the financial operation of charter schools need additional analysis and debate. The subject remains ambiguous as of the end of 1997.

- **Provide more technical assistance to charter schools and sponsoring agencies on monitoring pupil learning, providing services to special populations, charter school finance and budgeting, and (for start-up schools) covering facilities expenses.** Sponsoring agencies need to be more proactive about ensuring that charter schools establish "performance-based accountability systems." It is not appropriate to wait until the charter is up for renewal to assess student progress. Among many charter school personnel, the lack of expertise in areas such as special education and financial management should be remedied quickly.

When considering whether to expand, terminate, or modify the charter school approach, the Legislature must first address the ambiguities in the legislation mentioned above. Following that, one must ask several questions about the impacts of expansion, termination, or modification. Questions include:

1. What impact would expansion (i.e., raising or lifting the cap) have on the number of charter schools?
2. What impact would expansion have on sponsoring agencies?
3. Is the law being implemented as intended?
4. Are there any unintended negative consequences of the law?
5. What is the impact of the charter school approach on the public school system?

Charter schools and charter school research are clearly in the formative stages, as one would expect them to be at this point. In general, data do not exist to answer these questions, but the present study lays the groundwork necessary to address these questions fully and directly through future research.

Recommendations for further research

- **Future research should focus on fewer key research and policy questions.** Issues facing charter schools are complex and cannot be addressed adequately by looking at the surface. Although the present study provides a much-needed broad sweep of the current lay of the land, future research should not attempt to replicate this breadth because the value added would be minimal. Future research should build on the present study by focusing on one or two key areas. In-depth research on specialized topics could yield valuable guidance for the policy questions listed above. We recommend that future research focus on student outcomes and other indicators of charter school success; resource allocation in charter schools and in comparable noncharter schools; the frequency, quality, and results of charter school instructional practices; and the charter approval and renewal processes.

- **The CDE should consider a revised timetable for the next charter school study that allows a longer interval for data collection, analysis, and reporting.** There were several drawbacks of the short timetable of the present study. For example, it prevented the collection of uniform and complete data on student achievement and school performance. (Part of the problem here was also due to the multiple student assessment strategies employed by charter schools, a problem that will be partially solved by the new statewide assessment.) It also prevented an in-depth look at school finance issues and within-district comparisons.

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Appendix A

PROFILE OF CHARTER SCHOOL SURVEY RESPONDENTS

PROFILE OF CHARTER SCHOOL SURVEY RESPONDENTS

	Number of Schools	Percentage of Schools
Sponsor type (n=98)		
District	85	87%
County	7	7%
State	6	6%
Geographic location (n=98)		
Urban or central city area	19	19%
Urban fringe or suburban area	27	28%
Small town or community	32	33%
Rural area	13	13%
Other	7	7%
Primary instructional methods *(schools may use more than one)* (n=97)		
Classroom-based instruction	84	87%
Home-based learning with the parent as primary instructor	28[1]	29%
Independent study with a teacher as primary instructor	21	22%
Work and/or community-based learning beyond isolated projects	19	20%
Distance-learning and/or instruction via Internet or satellite	11	11%
Other	6	6%
School year began operating as a charter[2] (n=98)		
1993-94	30	31%
1994-95	26	27%
1995-96	22	22%
1996-97	20	20%

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[1] For the purpose of analyzing home schooling throughout this report, we identified 15 schools which used home-based learning as the predominant mode of instruction for the **majority** of their students. In the remaining 13 schools (all of which had multiple modes of instruction), either relatively few students participated in the schools' home-based learning programs, or data were insufficient to determine the extent of home-based learning.

[2] Assumes a July 1 - June 30 school year.

Appendix B

SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

CALIFORNIA CHARTER SCHOOL SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Start time: ______
Date: __/__/__

End time: ______
Interviewer initials: _____

INTERVIEWER INSTRUCTIONS:

- ***Bold, italics, or shaded things are generally not read.***
- ***Do not read "don't know", "refused" in shaded areas.***

INTRODUCTION

Hi, my name is ____________, and I'm calling from SRI International. As I mentioned when I first called you, this interview is part of a statewide evaluation of charter schools. Is this still a good time to talk? **(IF NOT, RESCHEDULE.)**

Have you had time to look up the data on the worksheet that we sent to you?

IF YES, CONTINUE TO READ THE INSTRUCTIONS

IF NO, Would you have time to look up those numbers and reschedule this interview in the next week?

IF YES OR PROBABLY, RESCHEDULE

IF NO: Why don't we take advantage of the time we've scheduled and proceed with the interview. You can give your best estimates. **READ INSTRUCTIONS**

INSTRUCTIONS

Except when noted, all questions refer to the 1996-97 school year. In reporting findings, we will only report aggregate statistics, your school will not be individually identified. **IF FILLED OUT WORKSHEET:** At several points (☑) in the interview I will ask you to refer to the worksheet you filled out. [**IF NOT FILLED OUT**: If you haven't completed it please give your best estimate of these numbers.]

In the interest of time, we have made most of the questions closed-ended—you will be able to choose from a list of answers that I will read to you. As I mentioned when I first spoke to you, the survey will take about 30 minutes. Do you have any questions before we begin?

A. Screening and Preliminary Questions

I'll start with some questions about your charter granting process. The first question refers to question 1 on your worksheet.

☑ 1. In what month and year was your school's charter granted?

(month/year) __ __ / 199__ **(fill in numeric codes)**

2. Are you currently operating as a charter school?

1 Yes ➔ ***skip to question 4***
0 No

3. **IF NO:** Was your charter revoked or withdrawn, or have you suspended operation?

1 Revoked
2 Withdrawn
3 Suspended operation
8 Don't know

Unfortunately the rest of this survey will not be relevant. Thank you for your time.

4. Did the district or the county grant your charter? **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 District
2 County ➔ ***skip to question 7***

The next question refers to question 2 on your worksheet. If you don't have the worksheet handy, would you please estimate this number.

☑ 5. During the 1996-97 school year, approximately what percentage of your students came from the district that sponsored your charter?

_____% of students **(fill in percentage or circle code)**
998 Don't know
999 Refused

CHECKPOINT: IF ANSWERED "90-100%"➔ *skip to question 9.*

6. Did the remaining students come from one district, 2-4 districts, more than 4 districts but not all over the state, or did the students come from all over the state. **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 One other district
2 Two to four other districts
3 More than four other districts but not statewide
4 Statewide
8 Don't know ➔ ***skip to question 8***

☑ 7. Please refer to number 3 on your worksheet for the name of the other district or districts and the approximate number of students from each. **(If county sponsored or students are from more than 4 districts or all over the state ask for the names of the districts that supply the most students**):

Name of District	# of students

The next few questions are related to the approval of your charter.

8. Did you revise your original charter or enter into any written or unwritten side agreements in order to obtain approval by your sponsoring district or county? Please clarify which, if any, apply. **(CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)** **(IF YES, clarify whether revised and/ or entered into any written or unwritten side agreements.)**

1 Yes - Revised original charter
2 Yes - Entered into written side agreements
3 Yes - Entered into unwritten side agreements
5 No → ***skip to question* 11**
8 Don't know → ***skip to question* 11**

IF ASKED: "Revise" includes the addition or subtraction of provisions in the charter or any substantial rewriting of provisions. These revisions could have taken place prior to formally submitting the charter petition to the sponsoring agency. In other words, this could have taken place in negotiations with your sponsoring district or county *during* the drafting process.

9. Which of the following areas did the revised provisions and/or side agreements cover? Please answer yes or no to each of the following. **(READ ITEMS)**

		Yes	No
a.	Teacher contract and personnel issues	1	2
b.	Curriculum and instruction	1	2
c.	Assessment	1	2
d.	Student admission requirements	1	2
e.	Governance	1	2
f.	Liability	1	2
g.	Financial independence	1	2
h.	Amount of funds received	1	2
i.	Amendment process to the charter	1	2
j.	Another issue area (Can you specify? ______________________)	1	2

10. Do you believe the revised provisions and/or side agreements helped, had no effect, or hindered your school's ability to **(READ LIST) (CIRCLE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH)**?

		Helped	No Effect	Hindered
a.	Implement your educational program as you envisioned	1	2	3
b.	Select, evaluate, and/or dismiss staff	1	2	3
c.	Control how and where you purchase goods and services	1	2	3
d.	Receive the revenue limit and categorical funds generated by your enrollment	1	2	3
e.	Remain financially solvent	1	2	3
f.	Be accountable for educational results	1	2	3

11. I am going to read you 4 options, then please let me know which one best characterizes your school. For schools not yet open, characterize the school as planned. **(CIRCLE ONE)**

    1 A newly created school, in other words the school was not previously connected to an existing school.
    2 Originally a public school that *converted entirely* to a charter school.
    3 Originally a public school program or grade levels within a public school that converted to a charter school. The original school may still be in operation as a noncharter entity.
    4 Originally a district or county program that converted to a charter school.

12. In what month and year did your school begin providing instruction to students under the new charter? **(fill in numbers or circle code)**

    (month/year) __ __ / 199__ → ***skip to next section***
    777 Still not open
    998 Don't know

Unfortunately the remainder of this survey will not be relevant to schools not yet providing instruction. Thank you for your time. Perhaps we will the opportunity to talk to you again in the future. Good luck.

B. School Characteristics

The next set of questions are about your school characteristics. For the first question please refer to question 4 on your worksheet.

☑ 1. What was your school's total student enrollment for the 1996-97 school year and on what date was the data reported? Please use your most recent student count.

_______ students Date of count: __ __/199__ **(fill in numbers or circle code)**

8 Don't know

2. What grade levels did your charter school serve in the 1996-97 school year? (If your school was ungraded, please indicate ages.)

FILL IN RANGE, CIRCLE CODES AFTER INTERVIEW: grades _____________

(CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY IN APPROPRIATE COLUMN: NOTE THAT CODES DO NOT MATCH THE NUMERIC GRADES.)

	School Grades		**Student Ages**
01	Prekindergarten	21	<5 years old
02	Kindergarten	22	5 years old
03	First grade	23	6 years old
04	Second grade	24	7 years old
05	Third grade	25	8 years old
06	Fourth grade	26	9 years old
07	Fifth grade	27	10 years old
08	Sixth grade	28	11 years old
09	Seventh grade	29	12 years old
10	Eighth grade	30	13 years old
11	Ninth grade	31	14 years old
12	Tenth grade	32	15 years old
13	Eleventh grade	33	16 years old
14	Twelfth grade	34	17 years old
		35	> 17 years old
98	Don't know	99	Refused

2. Which one of the following 5 options best describes your school's location? **(READ LIST) (CIRCLE ONE)**

1 Urban or central city area
2 Urban fringe or suburban area
3 Small town or community
4 Rural area
5 Other (specify: ______________________________________)

3. Does your school accept all students or only those who meet admission criteria? **(CIRCLE ONE)**
   1 Accept all students
   2 Accept only students that meet admission criteria

4. Which of the following factors can prevent new students from being admitted to your school? Please indicate yes or no for each item. **(READ LIST)**

		Yes	No	Don't Know
a.	Space limitation or enrollment cap	1	0	8
b.	Residency outside of school or district boundaries	1	0	8
c.	Student ethnicity, in other words your school considers ethnicity in order to achieve racial diversity	1	0	8
d.	Student's special needs because the school does not provide services such as special education or primary language instruction	1	0	8
e.	Student's prior academic performance	1	0	8
f.	Evidence that parent or adult cannot fulfill involvement requirements	1	0	8
g.	Student and/or parent is not committed to school's philosophy	1	0	8
h.	Something else (Please specify: ____________________________)	1	0	8

5. Did your school have more eligible applicants than it could serve during the 1996-97 school year?
   1 Yes
   0 No
   8 Don't know

C. Student Demographics

Now I would like to ask some background questions about your students. This next one refers to question 5 on your worksheet.

☑ 1. During the 1996-97 school year, how many of your students were eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program?

________ students **(fill in number or circle code)**
998 Don't know
999 Refused

2. Was your school eligible to participate in the federal Title 1 program or is your school's eligibility pending?
   1 Yes - eligible
   2 No - not eligible ➔ ***skip to question* 5**
   3 Eligibility is pending ➔ ***skip to question* 5**
   8 Don't know ➔ ***skip to question* 5**

3. IF YES: Was your school eligible for the schoolwide Title 1 program? By schoolwide, I mean that 50% or more of your students were from low-income homes.

   1 Yes
   0 No
   8 Don't know

4. In 1996-97, did you *receive* your Title 1 funds?

   1 Yes
   0 No
   8 Don't know

The next 6 questions are on your worksheet (questions 6-11).

☑ 5. How many of your students received special education services?

   ________ students **(fill in number or circle code)**
   998 Don't know
   999 Refused/Not applicable

> **IF ASKED:** "Special education services" are provided to students who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) because of a disability. If respondent disagrees with this definition or states that all students have individual learning plans, not tied to this federal definition, please circle "999" and make a note of what s/he says.

☑ 6. How many of your students would you consider gifted and talented students, in other words, they would qualify for GATE or a similar program? Please answer the estimated number who qualify, regardless of whether or not your school has a GATE program.

   ________ students **(fill in number or circle code)**
   998 Don't know
   999 Refused/Not applicable

☑ 7. How many students were identified as limited English proficient (LEP)?

   ________ students **(fill in number or circle code)**
   998 Don't know
   999 Refused/Not applicable

☑ 8. **IF HAVE LEP STUDENTS:** What were the most common languages spoken at your school and how many LEP students spoke each of these languages? **(FILL IN NUMBER OF STUDENTS FOR ALL LANGUAGES THAT APPLY; fill in 777 if they know a language was spoken but don't know how many students spoke it)**

	Number of Students		**Number of Students**
a. Spanish	_____	h. Lao	_____
b. Vietnamese	_____	i. Russian	_____
c. Hmong	_____	j. Other (specify):_______________	_____
d. Cantonese	_____	k. Other (specify):_______________	_____
e. Tagalog	_____	l. Other (specify):_______________	_____
f. Cambodian	_____	m. Other (specify):_______________	_____
g. Korean	_____	n. Other (specify):_______________	_____

☑ 9. Approximately what percentage of your students would you consider to be academically low-achieving?

________% students **(fill in PERCENTAGE or circle code)**
998 Don't know
999 Refused/Not applicable

☑ 10. What criteria did you use to determine the number of low-achieving students? **(READ LIST) (CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)**

1 Scores on standardized tests
2 Grades from previous school
3 Poverty status
4 Other means (Can you specify? ______________________________)
8 Don't know

D. Teachers

These next questions are regarding your instructional staff. Again, you should refer to your worksheet for these next 5 questions (questions 12-16 on worksheet).

☑ 1. How many staff professional development days did your school offer during the 1996-97 school year and during the summer prior to the 1996-97 school year? Please convert partial days to full-day equivalents, for example count two half day sessions as one professional development day. **(fill in number or circle code)**

Professional development days	**Number**	**Don't Know**
a. during the school year	_______	998
b. during the summer	_______	998

☑ 2. How many paid instructional staff did your school employ, including both part-time and full-time instructional staff? Please give me the total number.

_________ total instructional staff **(fill in number or circle code)**
998 Don't know

IF ASKED: "Instructional staff" includes only paid staff employed by your school. It includes aides, regular teachers, instructional coordinators, and supervisors, such as curriculum specialists, and teachers who supervise home school activities. It does not include administrators (principals, assistant principals, or vice-principals), unless these individuals have part-time instructional responsibilities. If they do, please count them as part-time "instructional."

☑ 3. How many full-time equivalent (FTE) instructional staff did your school employ?

_________ full-time equivalent **(fill in number or circle code)**
998 Don't know

☑ 4. Of your school's total paid instructional staff. . . . . **(IF THEY DON'T KNOW, WRITE "DK" IN BOX. SEE "IF ASKED" BOX ON NEXT PAGE)**

	Full-time staff	Part-time staff
How many were full-time and part-time?	______	______
How many of your full time staff had full state certification for the subjects they taught in your school? **(IF HAVE PART TIME STAFF)** How many of your part time staff had . . .	______	______
How many of your full time staff had CLAD or BCLAD certification or were certified to teach LEP students by equivalent certifications, such as the BCC? **(IF HAVE PART TIME STAFF)** How many of your part time staff had . . .	______	______
How many of your full time staff had special education credentials? **(IF HAVE PART TIME STAFF)** How many of your part time staff had . . .	______	______

NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: the sum of full-time and part-time in "a" should equal the answer to number 2 above.

IF ASKED: "Full state certification" refers to professionals who have completed education and training requirements mandated by state law to teach specific populations in California. It does not include emergency credential or personnel waivers. It does not include instructional staff who are working toward their credential. "CLAD" refers to the Crosscultural, Language, and Academic Development Certificate. "BCLAD" refers to the Bilingual, Crosscultural, Language, and Academic Development Certificate. "BCC" refers to the Bilingual Certificate of Competence.

☑ 5. We would like to know the ethnic/racial composition of your full 1996-97 paid instructional staff, including full and part time staff. How many of your teachers were **(READ ITEM). (FILL IN NUMBER OF STAFF)**

	All instructional staff
a. White, not of Hispanic origin	______
b. Black, not of Hispanic origin	______
c. Hispanic	______
d. Filipino	______
e. Asian or Pacific Islander	______
f. American Indian or Alaska Native	______

IF ASKED: Hispanic includes Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Spanish culture or origin; Filipino includes a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Philippine Islands; Asian or Pacific Islander includes a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Polynesian, Micronesian, or Melanesian islands, the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent; Alaska Native includes a person having origin in any of the original peoples of North America and who maintains tribal affiliation or community recognition.

6. If there any non-paid staff that contribute regularly to your instructional program, please briefly describe their roles. ______________________________

7. Which of the following items were included in your school's contractual agreement with your instructional staff and/or in your school's personnel policy? **(READ LIST) (CIRCLE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH) (SEE "IF ASKED" BOX ON NEXT PAGE)**

		Yes	No	Don't Know
a.	One-year at-will contract	1	0	8
b.	Granting of tenure at your school or acknowledgment of teacher's right to return to tenured position in district	1	0	8
c.	Annual performance evaluations	1	0	8
d.	Coverage by district retirement benefits package or equivalent	1	0	8
e.	Benefits package equivalent to or better than district's package	1	0	8
f.	Minimum hours of work	1	0	8
g.	Due process for dismissal proceedings	1	0	8

IF ASKED: "At-will contract" is a contract that either party may terminate on or before the end of the contract date. "Benefits package" may include both health benefits and leave policy (sick, bereavement, maternity, personal, etc.)

8. Were some, all, or none of your instructional staff members of bargaining units or unions?
   1 Yes - all were member of bargaining units
   2 Yes - some were member of bargaining units
   3 No - none were members of bargaining units

IF ASKED: "Bargaining units" are employee groups that bargain collectively with an employer and are typically members of or affiliated with state and national labor unions or groups. Membership refers only to any affiliation as charter school staff, whether or not the staff were previously affiliated with bargaining units or unions.

9. In your opinion, what has charter status allowed you to do that you could not have done under the traditional district management structure? Do you believe it has allowed you to **(READ LIST)**? **(CIRCLE APPROPRIATE NUMBER FOR ITEMS ANSWERED YES)**
   1 Reward teachers for exemplary performance
   2 Dismiss teachers for unsatisfactory performance
   3 Provide support to teachers to improve their skills
   4 Contract for services with non-district providers
   5 Allocate resources in a manner that is different from the district norm
   6 Purchase materials in a manner that is different from the district norm
   8 Don't know

Please refer to worksheet question 17.

☑ 10. What was your starting salary for new teachers in 1996-97? By new, we mean new to the teaching profession.

$____________ **(fill in number or circle code)**
998 Don't know
999 Refused/Not applicable

E. Finance

I would now like to shift to the topic of school finance. The next three questions are on your worksheet (questions 18-20)

☑ 1. What was your school's total operating budget during the 1996-97 school year?

$___________**(enter amount or circle code)**
998 Don't know
999 Refused/Not applicable

☑ 2. What was your school's total and per-pupil revenue, if applicable, from the following sources **(READ LIST)**? **(enter amount or circle code)**

	Total	Per Pupil (if applicable)	Don't know
a. State revenue limit	$_______	$_______	8
b. State categorical funds	$_______	$_______	8
c. State lottery funds	$_______	$_______	8
d. Federal funds	$_______	$_______	8
e. Private funds	$_______	$_______	8
f. Other public grants/miscellaneous government funds	$_______	$_______	8

IF ASKED: "Revenue limit funds" are base per-ADA revenues that school districts receive for every student in their district. "State categorical funds" are per-pupil funds received only for pupils that qualify for specific categorical programs such as Economic Impact Aid, GATE or Class Size Reduction. Together, these two sources of funds make up the total funds received from the state. "Private funds" refer to any money that came from individuals or private groups or organizations. These funds may include business donations and grants, as well as money raised through fundraising activities.

☑ 3. What percentage, if any, of total revenues generated by your school is retained by your sponsoring agency?

__________ % **(enter percentage or circle code)**

998 Don't know ➔ ***skip to question 6***
999 Refused/Not applicable ➔ ***skip to question 6***

4. IF SPONSORING AGENCY RETAINS FUNDS: Do you receive goods and/or services in exchange for retained funds?

1 Yes
0 No ➔ ***skip to question 6***
8 Don't know ➔ ***skip to question 6***

5. IF YES: Would you purchase these goods and/or services elsewhere if you could?

1 Yes
0 No
8 Don't know

6. Who at your school was primarily responsible for handling day-to-day financial management? Please give the person's title at your school.

____

7. Did you contract with external agencies or individuals, excluding your sponsoring district or county, for any of the following financial accounting or management services? Please answer yes or no for each one.

		Yes	No	Don't Know
a.	Payroll	1	2	8
b.	Bookkeeping	1	2	8
c.	Budget preparation	1	2	8
d.	Meeting state regulations, e.g., filling out forms	1	2	8
e.	Another financial accounting or management service (can you specify ______________________________)	1	2	8

IF ASKED: "Contract" does not include voluntary services.

8. What arrangements were made for your school's facilities? Which of the following statements best describes this arrangement? **(READ LIST) (CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)**

1 We used district facility at no cost.
2 We rented facilities from the district or county.
3 We rented facilities independent of the district or county.
4 We purchased facilities.
5 Other (Can you specify? ______________________________________)
8 Don't know/Not applicable

F. Authority for Budget, Administration, and School Policies

1. How much control did your school have over the following decisions and policies—full control, partial control, or no control **(READ LIST).(CIRCLE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH. "IF ASKED" IS ON NEXT PAGE)**

	Full Control	Partial Control	No Control	Don't Know
a. Purchasing of supplies and equipment	1	2	3	8
b. Student disciplinary policies	1	2	3	8
c. Student assessment policies	1	2	3	8
d. Student admission policies	1	2	3	8
e. Staff salaries and benefits	1	2	3	8
f. Budgetary expenses other than salaries and benefits	1	2	3	8
g. Daily schedule	1	2	3	8
h. School calendar	1	2	3	8
i. Establishing curriculum	1	2	3	8
j. Staff hiring, discipline and dismissal	1	2	3	8

IF ASKED: "Full control" means that the charter school can make decisions about this matter independent of the sponsoring agency, in other words, the school is not required to secure input or agreement from the sponsoring agency. "Partial control" means that the charter school shares decision-making power with the sponsoring agency, in other words, the charter school could not make a decision on this matter without input and agreement from the sponsoring agency. "No control" means that the sponsoring agency makes decisions about this matter without input or agreement from the charter school.

IF CIRCLED FULL CONTROL FOR ALL PREVIOUS ITEMS → ***skip to question 3***

2. Would you have wanted more control over any of the following decisions or policies? **(CIRCLE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH)**

	Yes	No	NA-already had full control
a. Purchasing of supplies and equipment	1	2	3
b. Staff salaries and benefits	1	2	3
c. Establishing curriculum	1	2	3
d. Staff hiring, discipline, and dismissal	1	2	3

3. How did you secure liability coverage for your school? Which of the following statements best describes your liability arrangement? **(READ LIST) (CIRCLE ONE)**

1 We are covered under the sponsoring agency's policy
2 We purchased insurance on our own from a local or statewide school insurance pool
3 We bought insurance from a private commercial carrier
4 We do not have liability insurance
8 Don't know

G. Charter School Design/Instructional Program

I would like to ask some questions about your school design and instructional program. Please refer to question 21 on your worksheet.

☑ 1. How many instructional calendar days did your school provide during the 1996-97 school year?

_______ calendar days **(fill in number or circle code)**
998 Don't know
999 Refused

2. Did your school operate on a year-round calendar?

1 Yes
0 No → ***skip to question 4***
8 Don't know → ***skip to question 4***

3. Please briefly explain what this year-round calendar looks like. ____________________

____

4. Which of the following are primary methods of delivering instruction to students at your school? We realize that you may use some of these methods occasionally, however, we are interested in finding out about how most students are taught on a regular basis. Please indicate yes or no for each instructional method. **(READ LIST)**

		Yes	No	Don't Know
a.	Classroom-based instruction	1	0	8
b.	Home-based learning with the parent as primary instructor	1	0	8
c.	Independent study with a teacher as primary instructor	1	0	8
d.	Work and/or community-based learning beyond isolated projects	1	0	8
e.	Distance-learning and/or instruction via Internet or satellite	1	0	8
f.	Other (specify ____________________)	1	0	8

5. Does your school's educational program emphasize any subject areas or do you provide equal emphasis on all disciplines? **(DO NOT READ LIST. CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)**

01 Math
02 Science
03 Technology
04 English/Language Arts
05 Social Studies/History
06 Performing Arts or Visual Arts
07 Equal emphasis on all disciplines
08 Other (Can you specify? ____________________)
98 Don't know/Not applicable

H. Student Assessment

The next set of questions refers to the assessment practices in use at your school.

1. Which of the following best describes your assessment system? **(READ LIST) (CIRCLE ONE NUMBER)**

1 Same for all students
2 Same for all students within a grade or developmental level
3 Varies from student to student
8 Don't know

The next two questions are question 22 and 23 on your worksheet.

☑ 2. The following are student assessment strategies or methods. For each item, please indicate whether it is essential, important, used but not considered, or not used to assess student performance at your school? **(READ LIST. CIRCLE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH ITEM)**

	Used - Essential	Used - Important	Used - Not Considered	Not Used	Don't Know
a. Teacher assigned grades	1	2	3	4	8
b. Student portfolios	1	2	3	4	8
c. *Standardized achievement tests	1	2	3	4	8
d. Performance-based tests developed locally	1	2	3	4	8
e. Performance-based tests developed nationally or commercially	1	2	3	4	8
f. Student demonstrations or exhibitions	1	2	3	4	8
g. Student interviews or surveys	1	2	3	4	8
h. Behavioral indicators, such as attendance and suspension	1	2	3	4	8

IF ASKED: "Essential" refers to the assessment strategies or methods that are most critical in assessing student performance. "Important" refers to the second tier of strategies and methods used in assessing student performance. "Not considered" refers to the strategies or methods that are used at the school for purposes other than assessing individual student performance, for example, required by the district.

CHECKPOINT: IF DID NOT CHECK "C" ABOVE → *skip to next section*

☑ *3. **IF CHECKED "C" ABOVE**: Which standardized test(s) did you administer and at which grade levels during the 1995-96 school year? Please also tell me what the mean normal curve equivalent (NCE) scores were for the reading and math portions for each test at grade levels 4, 5, 8, or 10. If you are unable to report NCE scores, please provide scores in a form that is available, such as percentiles, percentage scoring above 50%, etc.

			1995-96 Mean NCE	
(1) Name of test	**(2) Grade level(s) tested**	**(3) Grade reporting, e.g., 4th**	**(4) Reading**	**(5) Math**
a. ________				
b. ________				
c. ________				

❑ Check here if NCE scores are not available. Report scores in alternative form. Be sure to clarify what these figures represent (percentiles, percent scoring above a certain benchmark, etc.).

I. School Accountability

1. Do you report any of the following data to your sponsoring district or county?

		Yes	No	Don't Know
a.	Student achievement data	1	0	8
b.	Student behavioral indicators, e.g., attendance	1	0	8
c.	Finance and accounting data	1	0	8
d.	Parent satisfaction data	1	0	8
e.	Other data (can you specify? ________________)	1	0	8

2. Has the sponsoring district or county ever requested specific actions or imposed sanctions in response to these data?

   1 Yes
   0 No → ***skip to next section***
   8 Don't know → ***skip to next section***

3. **IF YES,** What actions were required/sanctions imposed?

   ____

   ____

J. Parental and Adult Involvement

I would like to switch to the topic of parent and adult involvement in your school.

1. Does your school require any of the following from parents or adults? Please indicate whether or not parents or adults are required to . . . **(READ LIST)**?

		Yes	No	Don't Know
a.	Sign a contract with the school	1	0	8
b.	Participate in a minimum number of hours at the school	1	0	8
c.	Participate in a minimum number of activities	1	0	8
d.	Participate on committees or the governance board, or to attend parent meetings	1	0	8

IF ANSWERED NO TO ALL OF A-D → ***skip to question 3***

> **IF ASKED:** "Adult involvement" refers to an arrangement the school may have made for families with parents unable to fulfil involvement requirements (e.g., single parent that works, student living in group home). In these cases, the student may be designated an adult mentor or supervisor who is expected to fulfil the same requirements expected of parents.

2. **IF YES TO ANY ONE OF A-D:** Has a student ever been asked to leave because his or her parent or adult has failed to fulfill these requirements?

1 Yes
0 No
8 Don't know

3. Does your school systematically assess parent satisfaction?

1 Yes
0 No → ***skip to question 5***
8 Don't know → ***skip to question 5***

4. **IF YES:** How does your school determine parent satisfaction? Please answer yes or no for each item. Does your school use (READ ITEM)?

	Yes	No	Don't Know
a. Surveys	1	2	8
b. Interviews and/or focus groups	1	2	8
c. Behavioral indicators, such as attending school meetings	1	2	8
d. Other means (Can you specify? ________________________)	1	2	8

The next two questions are on your worksheet (questions 24-25).

☑ 5. During the 1996-97 school year, approximately what percentage of your parents or adults participated in **(READ LIST)**?

	Percentage of Parents	Don't Know
a. Parent-teacher conferences	______%	8
b. Ongoing monitoring of student homework completion	______%	8
c. Instructional roles at your school	______%	8

☑ 6. During the 1996-97 school year, approximately what number of your parents or adults served on **(READ LIST)**? **(fill in number or circle code)**

	Number of Parents	Don't Know
a. The school governing board	______	8
b. Other advisory bodies or task forces	______	8

K. Future plans and final remarks

We've reached the final section. The following question is worksheet question 26.

☑ 1. On what month and day do you expect to begin your school's 1997-98 academic year?

Month __ __ **(fill in numeric code)** Day __ __ **(fill in number, use a leading zero)**
9998 Don't Know
9999 Refused/Not applicable

2. Will your enrollment increase, stay the same, or decrease during the 1997-98 school year?

1 Increase
2 Stay the same
3 Decrease
8 Don't know

3. Will the number of grades or grade-level groupings covered by your charter school increase, stay the same, or decrease during the 1997-98 school year?

1 Increase
2 Stay the same
3 Decrease
8 Don't know

4. Has your charter gone through a renewal process yet?

1 Yes
0 No ➔ ***skip to question 6***
8 Don't know ➔ ***skip to question 6***

5. **IF YES:** In what month and year was your charter renewed?

(month/year) __ __ / 199__ **(fill in numeric codes or circle code)**
998 Don't know

6. In what month and year is your charter up for its next renewal?

(month/year) __ __ / 199__ or 200_ **(fill in numeric codes or circle code)**
998 Don't know

On this final question I want to make sure that I haven't missed anything that you consider to be a defining feature of your school. Please briefly list up to four things that you would like me to know about your charter school that this survey has not already captured. **(IF THEY WANT TOPIC IDEAS OR GUIDANCE:** your student population, your curriculum focus, your instructional delivery methods, or your school's philosophy.) **THIS IS OPTIONAL: THERE'S NO OBLIGATION TO FILL IN ALL FOUR LINES.**

1.____

2.____

3.____

4.____

CLOSING

Okay, we are done! Thank you very much for helping us with this survey. The information you have provided will contribute greatly to our understanding of charter schools in California. At the end of this year we will report our overall findings to the Legislative Analysts' Office, who will in turn make recommendations to the Legislature about the state's charter school law. Again, thank you for your time and cooperation.

CALIFORNIA CHARTER SCHOOL STUDY: DISTRICT SURVEY

QUESTIONS? PLEASE CONTACT:

Julie Marsh (650) 859-5001
(email: jmarsh@unix.sri.com)

Please use the enclosed envelope to return the completed survey to:

California Charter School Project
SRI International
333 Ravenswood Avenue, BS-125
Menlo Park, CA 94025

CALIFORNIA CHARTER SCHOOL STUDY: DISTRICT SURVEY

Dear Superintendent:

This questionnaire is an important part of a statewide study on California's charter schools being conducted by SRI International for the Legislative Analyst's Office. The results of this study will be used by the California legislature in its upcoming 1998 review of California's charter school legislation. Therefore, it is very important that your district contribute to this process, so that legislators will have access to the most up-to-date and complete information possible. Here are several important points that will help you complete the questionnaire.

The questionnaire consists of a main body and a supplement for each charter school in your school district. The main body consists of the following sections:

- Section A: Background Questions
- Section B: Background on District Teachers
- Section C: Charter School Policies
- Section D: School Accountability and Student Assessment
- Section E: Impacts and Concerns

The supplement(s) is Section F and contains questions that pertain to specific charter school(s) in your district.

The majority of questions in the questionnaire have been designed to make responses user friendly. However, some additional effort may be required to obtain some quantitative information, such as achievement test scores, and copies of district and charter school SARCs to be returned with the questionnaire.

- Please write your answers directly on the questionnaire, by circling the appropriate number or code or by writing in the space provided.
- Except when noted, all questions refer to the 1996-97 school year.
- Please complete the questionnaire and return it in the enclosed envelope by **September 5**.

Thank you for your help in this important project.

A. BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

A1. What grade levels are taught in your district's schools? **(PLEASE FILL IN GRADE LEVELS SERVED, FOR EXAMPLE, K-12)**

_________________ grade levels taught

A2. How many students in your district received special education services during the 1996-97 school year? **(FILL IN NUMBER OR CIRCLE CODE)**

_________ students
0 none

Clarification: "Special education services" are provided to students who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) because of a disability.

A3. How many students in your district were identified as limited English proficient (LEP)? **(FILL IN NUMBER OR CIRCLE CODE)**

_________ students
0 none

A4. How many instructional calendar days did your district's non-charter schools provide during the 1996-97 school year? **(FILL IN NUMBER)**

________ calendar days

A5. What was your district's total and per-pupil revenue limit funding generated by ADA in 1996-97? **(ENTER AMOUNT OR CIRCLE CODE)**

	Total	Per Pupil
State revenue limit	$________	$________

A6. How many of your district's students attended schools outside of their normal attendance boundaries? **(FILL IN NUMBER OR CIRCLE CODE)**

________ students
0000 none
9998 Don't know

B. BACKGROUND ON DISTRICT TEACHERS

B1. On average, how many staff professional development days did your district offer per school during the 1996-97 school year? **(ENTER NUMBERS)**

a. During the school year: ________ professional development days

b. During the summer: ________ professional development days

B2. How many paid instructional staff (including charter staff, if they are considered to be employees of the district) did your district employ in the 1996-97 school year, including both part-time and full-time instructional staff? **(ENTER NUMBER)**

_________ total instructional staff

> **Clarification:** "Instructional staff" includes only paid staff employed by your district. It includes aides, regular teachers, instructional coordinators, and supervisors, such as curriculum specialists, and teachers who supervise home school activities. It does not include administrators (principals, assistant principals, or vice-principals) unless these individuals have part-time instructional responsibilities. If they do, please count them as part-time "instructional staff."

B3. Please enter the numbers of full-time and part-time paid instructional staff, and the numbers of full-time and part-time paid instructional staff who held the certificates listed below.

	Full-time staff	Part-time staff
How many of the district's professional staff were full-time and part-time?	______	______
How many of the district's full-time and part-time instructional staff had full state certification for the subjects they taught in 1996-97?	______	______
How many of the district's full-time and part-time instructional staff had CLAD or BCLAD certification or were certified to teach LEP students by equivalent certifications, such as the BCC, in 1996-97?	______	______
How many of the district's full-time and part-time instructional staff had special education credentials in 1996-97?	______	______

B4. What was the average annual starting salary for new full-time teachers in your district in 1996-97? **(ENTER DOLLAR AMOUNT)**

$__________ annual full-time starting salary

> **Clarification:** "Starting salary" refers to Step 1 of your district's salary schedule. By "new," we mean new to the teaching profession.

B5. Were some, all, or none of your district's non-charter school instructional staff members of collective bargaining units or unions? **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 All were members of bargaining units

2 Some were members of bargaining units

3 None were members of bargaining units

C. CHARTER SCHOOL POLICIES

C1. How many petitions for charter schools have been submitted to your school district since 1992? Please count schools/charter developers that submitted more than one petition for a particular school only once. **(FILL IN NUMBER)**

_______ petitions

C2. Of this number of petitions submitted, how many were ultimately approved, denied, withdrawn, and are still pending? **(PLEASE FILL IN NUMBERS)**

______ approved

______ denied

______ withdrawn

______ pending

______ other **(please specify)** ______________________________ __________

______ TOTAL PETITIONS SUBMITTED

NOTE: The total number in this column should equal the number reported in C1.

C3. Please indicate why the district has denied approval for charter school petitions. **(CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)**

01 Not applicable; district has not denied charter petitions
02 Lack of teacher support
03 Lack of parent/community support
04 Projected enrollment too small
05 Inadequate instructional program or instructional emphasis
06 Inadequate organizational capacity
07 Inadequate financial management or financial accountability system
08 Inadequate accountability system for student learning/outcomes
09 Opposition of teacher union
10 School board not supportive of charter school concept
11 Other (**please specify**) ____

____

____

C4. Are there written district policies regarding any of the following areas? **(CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)**

0 No written district policies regarding charter schools → ***GO to question C7***

1 Granting of charter

2 Renewal of charter

3 Resolution of disputes with charter schools

4 Imposing sanctions if charter school is not meeting goals

5 Other (**please specify**) ______________________________

FOR DISTRICTS WITH ONLY ONE CHARTER SCHOOL, PLEASE CHECK HERE ☐ AND GO to question C7

C5. FOR DISTRICTS WITH MORE THAN ONE CHARTER SCHOOL:

Do any of these policies vary by charter school or are they the same for all charter schools? **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 Vary by charter school

2 Same for all charter schools → ***GO to question C7***

C6. Which policy/policies vary by charter school? **(CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)**

1 Granting of charter

2 Renewal of charter

3 Resolution of disputes with charter schools

4 Imposing sanctions if charter school is not meeting goals

5 Other (**please specify**) ______________________________

C7. Which of the following describes your district's position or policy regarding the legal independence of charter schools? **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 We require all charter schools to become legally independent

2 We allow, but do not require, charter schools to become legally independent

3 We prohibit charter schools from becoming legally independent

4 Other (**please specify**) ______________________________

D. SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY AND STUDENT ASSESSMENT

D1. Which of the following types of data do you require from non-charter schools in your district? (**CIRCLE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH ITEM**)

		YES	NO
a.	Student achievement test scores	1	0
b.	Teacher-assigned grades	1	0
c.	Student scores from authentic assessment tests	1	0
d.	Student behavioral indicators, e.g., attendance	1	0
e.	Finance and accounting data	1	0
f.	Parent satisfaction data	1	0
g.	Other data (**please specify**) ____________________	1	0

D2. Has the district ever requested specific actions or imposed sanctions on non-charter schools in response to these data? **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 Yes

0 No ➜ ***GO to question D4***

8 Don't know ➜ ***GO to question D4***

D3. Please describe these actions:

____

____

____

D4. Which of the following types of data do you require from the charter school(s) in your district? (**CIRCLE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH ITEM**)

		YES	NO
a.	Student achievement test scores	1	0
b.	Teacher-assigned grades	1	0
c.	Student scores from authentic assessment tests	1	0
d.	Student behavioral indicators, e.g., attendance	1	0
e.	Finance and accounting data	1	0
f.	Parent satisfaction data	1	0
g.	Other data (**please specify**) ____________________	1	0

D5. Has the district ever requested specific actions or imposed sanctions on the charter school(s) in response to these data? **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 Yes

0 No → ***GO to question D7***

8 Don't know → ***GO to question D7***

D6. Please describe these actions:

____

____

____

D7. How does the district assess whether or not the charter school(s) is achieving the goals of its charter? (**CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY**)

1 We hire an external consultant or evaluator to conduct a review

2 We convene a group representing the community to conduct a review

3 We use internal district staff to conduct a review

4 Other (**please specify**) ______________________________

5 We have not yet assessed whether or not the school(s) is achieving its goals

D8. Do none, some, most, or all of the non-charter schools in your district submit a school accountability report card (SARC)? **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 None

2 Some

3 Most

4 All

D9. Do none, some, most, or all of the charter schools in your district submit a school accountability report card (SARC)? **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 None

2 Some

3 Most

4 All

If ANY charter schools submit a SARC, please attach a copy/copies when returning this survey.

D10. Are the SARCs submitted by non-charter and charter schools the same or different in content? **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 Same → ***GO to question D12***

2 Different

D11. Please describe these differences.

____

____

____

D12. Did your district conduct assessments of student achievement using standardized achievement tests during the 1995-96 school year? **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 Yes

0 No → ***GO to question D14***

D13. Please review testing conducted during the **1995-96** school year. If your district administered the test(s) at the following grade level(s) indicated below, please enter the district's mean normal curve equivalent (NCE) scores for the reading and math portions of each test. If you are unable to report NCE scores, please provide scores in a form that is available, such as percentiles. If you did not administer this test(s), please check the appropriate box below.

NOTE: IF THIS MATRIX IS BLANK, GO TO QUESTION D14.

	1995-96 Mean NCE		**N/A**
Name of test and grade level	**Reading**	**Math**	**Did not administer**
a.			
b.			
c.			
d.			

☐ Check here if NCE scores are not available. If scores are available in an alternative form, please indicate the type of score reported and report the scores above.
Type of score reported: ______________________

D14. Did your district conduct assessments of student achievement using standardized achievement tests during the 1996-97 school year? **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 Yes

0 No → ***GO to question D16***

D15. In 1996-97, did your district require any charter school(s) in your district to administer some or all of the same standardized tests used by non-charter schools in the district? **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 Yes - We required this of all charter schools in the district

2 Yes - We required this of some charter schools in the district

3 No - We did not require this of charter schools in the district

D16. In 1996-97, did you compare student achievement/performance between the charter and non-charter schools in your district? **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 Yes

0 No → ***GO to question E1***

D17. Which of the following indicators did you use to compare student achievement/ performance? **(CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)**

1 Achievement test scores

2 Teacher-assigned grades

3 Authentic assessments, e.g., performance-based tests, portfolios

4 Student behavioral indicators, e.g., attendance

5 Parent reports

6 Teacher reports

7 Other data (**please specify**) ____

E. IMPACTS AND CONCERNS

E1. Are there ways in which the charter school(s) in your district has influenced the district or other schools in your district (e.g., district policies, curriculum and instruction, accountability, and purchasing)? If so, please specify.

____

____

____

____

____

E2. Do you have concerns in any particular area(s) about the charter school(s) in your district (e.g., finances, accountability, collective bargaining, facilities, capital needs, instructional program, legal issues)? If so, please explain your concerns.

____

____

____

____

____

PLEASE GO TO THE ATTACHED CHARTER SCHOOL SUPPLEMENT(S).
FILL OUT ONE SUPPLEMENT FOR EACH CHARTER SCHOOL
IN YOUR DISTRICT. THANK YOU.

Return the district survey and school supplement(s) in the enclosed envelope to:

California Charter School Project
SRI International
333 Ravenswood Avenue, BS-125
Menlo Park, CA 94025

F. CHARTER SCHOOL SUPPLEMENT

THIS SUPPLEMENTAL SURVEY REFERS TO THE FOLLOWING CHARTER SCHOOL:

____

F1. Which of the following groups were asked to provide input into the decision to grant this charter petition? **(CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)**

01 District administrators
02 School administrators (e.g., principals)
03 School board
04 Teachers
05 Bargaining units for certificated staff
06 Bargaining units for classified staff
07 Parents
08 Community members
09 Students
10 Other **(please specify)** ________________________________

F2. Of the following list, what were the 3 most important factors considered in granting this school's charter? **(CIRCLE 3)**

01 Teacher contract and personnel issues
02 Curriculum and instruction
03 Assessment/student outcomes
04 Student admissions
05 Governance
06 Liability
07 Amount of funds received
08 Support of teachers
09 Support of bargaining units
10 Support of parents
11 Another issue area **(please specify)** ________________________

F3. How would you describe the contractual agreement of teachers in this charter school? Charter school teachers are . . . **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 Covered entirely by the district's contractual agreement with teachers in non-charter schools → ***GO to question F5***

2 Covered partially by the district's contractual agreement with teachers in non-charter schools (i.e., there are side agreements for some issues or some provisions have been removed)

3 Covered entirely by a separate contractual agreement with their charter school

4 Not covered by a contractual agreement → ***GO to question F5***

8 Don't know → ***GO to question F5***

F4. Please specify how the charter school teachers' contractual agreement is different from the regular district agreement.

____

____

____

____

F5. In 1996-97, how much control did this charter school have over the following decisions and policies—full control, partial control, or no control? **(CIRCLE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH ITEM)**

	Full control	Partial control	No control	Don't know
a. Purchasing of supplies and equipment	1	2	3	8
b. Student disciplinary policies	1	2	3	8
c. Student assessment policies	1	2	3	8
d. Student admission policies	1	2	3	8
e. Staff salaries and benefits	1	2	3	8
f. Budgetary expenses other than salaries and benefits	1	2	3	8
g. Daily schedule	1	2	3	8
h. School calendar	1	2	3	8
i. Establishing curriculum	1	2	3	8
j. Staff hiring, discipline, and dismissal	1	2	3	8

F6. Did your district retain any of the total revenues generated by the charter school in 1996-97? **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 Yes

0 No ➔ ***GO to question F11***

8 Don't know ➔ ***GO to question F11***

F7. What **percentage** of total revenues was retained by the district in 1996-97? **(ENTER PERCENTAGE)**

__________ %

F8. Did your district provide the charter school with services or goods in exchange for these funds? **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 Yes

0 No ➔ ***GO to question F11***

F9. What services did the district provide for this charter school in exchange for retained funds? **(CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)**

1 Payroll

2 Bookkeeping

3 Budget preparation

4 Meeting state regulations, e.g., filling out forms

5 Supplies and equipment

6 Reduced or free rent for district facilities

7 Other goods and services (**please specify**) ____________________________

F10. Was the charter school required to purchase all, some, or none of these services from the district? The charter school was. . . **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 Required to purchase all of these services from the district

2 Required to purchase some of these services from the district

3 Not required to purchase any of these services from the district

F11. How did this charter school secure liability coverage in 1996-97? Which of the following statements best describes the liability arrangement?

1 Charter school was covered under district's liability insurance
2 Charter school purchased own liability insurance
3 Charter school did not have liability insurance
4 Other (**please specify**) ______________________________
8 Don't know

F12. Has this charter gone through a renewal process(es)?

1 Yes
0 No ➜ ***SKIP TO END***

F13. Did you renew the charter?

1 Yes
0 No

F14. What factors were considered by the district during the charter **renewal** process?

____

____

____

____

Thank you very much for helping us with this survey. The information you have provided will contribute greatly to our understanding of districts with charter schools in California. At the end of this year, we will report our overall findings to the Legislative Analyst's Office, who will in turn make recommendations to the legislature about the state's charter school law. Again, thank you for your time and cooperation.

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SRI International
333 Ravenswood Avenue, BS-125
Menlo Park, CA 94025

REMEMBER:
Please enclose a copy of each charter school's SARC with the completed survey

CALIFORNIA CHARTER SCHOOL STUDY: COUNTY SURVEY

QUESTIONS? PLEASE CONTACT:

Julie Marsh (650) 859-5001
(email: jmarsh@unix.sri.com)

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The supplement(s) is Section E and contains questions that pertain to specific charter school(s) sponsored by your county.

The majority of questions in the questionnaire have been designed to make responses user friendly. However, some additional effort may be required to obtain some quantitative information and copies of charter school SARCs to be returned with the questionnaire.

- Please write your answers directly on the questionnaire, by circling the appropriate number or code or by writing in the space provided.
- Except when noted, all questions refer to the 1996-97 school year.
- Please complete the questionnaire and return it in the enclosed envelope by **September 5**.

Thank you for your help in this important project.

A. BACKGROUND ON COUNTY INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF

A1. How many paid instructional staff (including charter staff, if they are considered to be employees of the county) did your county employ in the 1996-97 school year, including both part-time and full-time instructional staff? **(ENTER NUMBER)**

_________ total instructional staff

Clarification: "Instructional staff" includes only paid staff employed by your county. It includes aides, regular teachers, instructional coordinators, and supervisors, such as curriculum specialists, and teachers who supervise home school activities. It does not include administrators unless these individuals have part-time instructional responsibilities. If they do, please count them as part-time "instructional staff."

A2. Please enter the numbers of full-time and part-time paid instructional staff, and the numbers of full-time and part-time paid instructional staff who held the certificates listed below.

	Full-time staff	Part-time staff
How many of the county's instructional staff were full-time and part-time?	______	______
How many of the county's full-time and part-time instructional staff had full state certification for the subjects they taught in 1996-97?	______	______
How many of the county's full-time and part-time instructional staff had CLAD or BCLAD certification or were certified to teach LEP students by equivalent certifications, such as the BCC, in 1996-97?	______	______
How many of the county's full-time and part-time instructional staff had special education credentials in 1996-97?	______	______

A3. What was the average annual starting salary for new full-time instructional staff employed by your county office of education in 1996-97? **(ENTER DOLLAR AMOUNT)**

$_________ annual full-time starting salary

Clarification: "Starting salary" refers to Step 1 of your county's salary schedule. By "new," we mean new to the teaching profession.

A4. Were some, all, or none of your county's non-charter instructional staff members of collective bargaining units or unions? **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 All were members of bargaining units

2 Some were members of bargaining units

3 None were members of bargaining units

B. CHARTER SCHOOL POLICIES

B1. How many petitions for charter schools have been submitted to your county office of education since 1992? Please count schools/charter developers that submitted more than one petition for a particular school only once. **(FILL IN NUMBER)**

_______ petitions

B2. Of this number of petitions submitted, how many were ultimately approved, denied, withdrawn, and are still pending? **(PLEASE FILL IN NUMBERS)**

______ approved

______ denied

______ withdrawn

______ pending

______ other **(please specify)** ____

______ TOTAL PETITIONS SUBMITTED

NOTE: The total number in this column should equal the number reported in B1.

B3. Please indicate why your county has denied approval for charter school petitions. **(CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)**

01 Not applicable; county has not denied charter petitions

02 Lack of teacher support

03 Lack of parent/community support

04 Projected enrollment too small

05 Inadequate instructional program or instructional emphasis

06 Inadequate organizational capacity

07 Inadequate financial management or financial accountability system

08 Inadequate accountability system for student learning/outcomes

09 Opposition of teacher union

10 Local school board not supportive of charter school concept

11 Other (**please specify**) ____

____

B4. Does your county office of education have written policies regarding any of the following areas? **(CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)**

0 No written county policies regarding charter schools ➜ ***GO to question B7***

1 Granting of charter

2 Renewal of charter

3 Resolution of disputes with charter schools

4 Imposing sanctions if charter school is not meeting goals

5 Other (**please specify**) ______________________________

FOR COUNTIES WITH ONLY ONE CHARTER SCHOOL, PLEASE CHECK HERE ☐ AND GO to question B7

B5. FOR COUNTIES WITH MORE THAN ONE CHARTER SCHOOL:

Do any of these policies vary by charter school or are they the same for all charter schools? **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 Vary by charter school

2 Same for all charter schools ➜ ***GO to question B7***

B6. Which policy/policies vary by charter school? **(CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)**

1 Granting of charter

2 Renewal of charter

3 Resolution of disputes with charter schools

4 Imposing sanctions if charter school is not meeting goals

5 Other (**please specify**) ______________________________

B7. Which of the following describes your county's position or policy regarding the legal independence of charter schools? **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 We require all charter schools to become legally independent

2 We allow, but do not require, charter schools to become legally independent

3 We prohibit charter schools from becoming legally independent

4 Other (**please specify**) ______________________________

C. SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY AND STUDENT ASSESSMENT

C1. Which of the following types of data do you require from the charter school(s) in your county? (**CIRCLE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH ITEM**)

		YES	NO
a.	Student achievement test scores	1	0
b.	Teacher-assigned grades	1	0
c.	Student scores from authentic assessment tests	1	0
d.	Student behavioral indicators, e.g., attendance	1	0
e.	Finance and accounting data	1	0
f.	Parent satisfaction data	1	0
g.	Other data (**please specify**) ______________________	1	0

C2. Has the county ever requested specific actions or imposed sanctions on the charter school(s) in response to these data? **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 Yes

0 No ➔ ***GO to question C4***

8 Don't know ➔ ***GO to question C4***

C3. Please describe these actions:

____

____

____

C4. How does the county assess whether or not the charter school(s) is achieving the goals of its charter? (**CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY**)

1 We hire an external consultant or evaluator to conduct a review

2 We convene a group representing the community to conduct a review

3 We use internal county staff to conduct a review

4 Other (**please specify**) ______________________________________

5 We have not yet assessed whether or not the school(s) is achieving its goals

C5. Do none, some, most, or all of the charter schools sponsored by your county submit a school accountability report card (SARC)? **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 None

2 Some

3 Most

4 All

If ANY charter schools submit a SARC, please attach a copy/copies when returning this survey.

C6. In 1996-97, did you compare student achievement/performance between the charter and non-charter schools in your county? **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 Yes

0 No → ***GO to question D1***

C7. Which of the following indicators did you use to compare student achievement/ performance? **(CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)**

1 Achievement test scores

2 Teacher-assigned grades

3 Authentic assessments, e.g., performance-based tests, portfolios

4 Student behavioral indicators, e.g., attendance

5 Parent reports

6 Teacher reports

7 Other data (**please specify**) ________________________________

D. IMPACTS AND CONCERNS

D1. Are there ways in which the charter school(s) in your county has influenced the county or other programs operated by the county (e.g., county policies, curriculum and instruction, accountability, and purchasing)? If so, please specify.

D2. Do you have concerns in any particular area(s) about the charter school(s) your county sponsors (e.g., finances, accountability, collective bargaining, facilities, capital needs, instructional program, legal issues)? If so, please explain your concerns.

PLEASE GO TO THE ATTACHED CHARTER SCHOOL SUPPLEMENT(S). FILL OUT ONE SUPPLEMENT FOR EACH CHARTER SCHOOL SPONSORED BY YOUR COUNTY. THANK YOU.

Return the survey and school supplement(s) in the enclosed envelope to:

California Charter School Project
SRI International
333 Ravenswood Avenue, BS-125
Menlo Park, CA 94025

E. CHARTER SCHOOL SUPPLEMENT

THIS SUPPLEMENTAL SURVEY REFERS TO THE FOLLOWING CHARTER SCHOOL:

____

E1. Which of the following groups were asked to provide input into the decision to grant this charter petition? **(CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)**

00 County administrators
01 District administrators
02 School administrators (e.g., principals)
03 School board
04 Teachers
05 Bargaining units for certificated staff
06 Bargaining units for classified staff
07 Parents
08 Community members
09 Students
10 Other **(please specify)** ______________________________

E2. Of the following list, what were the 3 most important factors considered in granting this school's charter? **(CIRCLE 3)**

01 Teacher contract and personnel issues
02 Curriculum and instruction
03 Assessment/student outcomes
04 Student admissions
05 Governance
06 Liability
07 Amount of funds received
08 Support of teachers
09 Support of bargaining units
10 Support of parents
11 Another issue area **(please specify)** ________________________

E3. How would you describe the contractual agreement of teachers in this charter school? Charter school teachers are . . . **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 Covered entirely by the county's contractual agreement with teachers in non-charter schools → ***GO to question E5***

2 Covered partially by the county's contractual agreement with teachers in non-charter schools (i.e., there are side agreements for some issues or some provisions have been removed)

3 Covered entirely by a separate contractual agreement with their charter school

4 Not covered by a contractual agreement → ***GO to question E5***

5 Other (**please specify**) ______________________ → ***GO to question E5***

8 Don't know → ***GO to question E5***

E4. Please specify how the charter school teachers' contractual agreement is different from the regular county agreement.

E5. In 1996-97, how much control did this charter school have over the following decisions and policies—full control, partial control, or no control? **(CIRCLE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH ITEM)**

	Full control	Partial control	No control	Don't know
a. Purchasing of supplies and equipment	1	2	3	8
b. Student disciplinary policies	1	2	3	8
c. Student assessment policies	1	2	3	8
d. Student admission policies	1	2	3	8
e. Staff salaries and benefits	1	2	3	8
f. Budgetary expenses other than salaries and benefits	1	2	3	8
g. Daily schedule	1	2	3	8
h. School calendar	1	2	3	8
i. Establishing curriculum	1	2	3	8
j. Staff hiring, discipline, and dismissal	1	2	3	8

E6. Did your county retain any of the total revenues generated by the charter school in 1996-97? **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 Yes

0 No → ***GO to question E11***

8 Don't know → ***GO to question E11***

E7. What **percentage** of total revenues was retained by the county in 1996-97? **(ENTER PERCENTAGE)**

___________ %

E8. Did your county provide the charter school with services or goods in exchange for these funds? **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 Yes

0 No → ***GO to question E11***

E9. What services did the county provide for this charter school in exchange for retained funds? **(CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)**

1 Payroll

2 Bookkeeping

3 Budget preparation

4 Meeting state regulations, e.g., filling out forms

5 Supplies and equipment

6 Reduced or free rent for facilities

7 Other goods and services (**please specify**) ___________________________

E10. Was the charter school required to purchase all, some, or none of these services from the county? The charter school was. . . **(CIRCLE ONE)**

1 Required to purchase all of these services from the county

2 Required to purchase some of these services from the county

3 Not required to purchase any of these services from the county

E11. How did this charter school secure liability coverage in 1996-97? Which of the following statements best describes the liability arrangement?

1 Charter school was covered under county's liability insurance

2 Charter school purchased own liability insurance

3 Charter school did not have liability insurance

4 Other (**please specify**) ______________________________

8 Don't know

E12. Has this charter gone through a renewal process(es)?

1 Yes

0 No → ***SKIP TO END***

E13. Did you renew the charter?

1 Yes

0 No

E14. What factors were considered by the county during the charter **renewal** process?

____

____

____

____

Thank you very much for helping us with this survey. The information you have provided will contribute greatly to our understanding of districts with charter schools in California. At the end of this year, we will report our overall findings to the Legislative Analyst's Office, who will in turn make recommendations to the legislature about the state's charter school law. Again, thank you for your time and cooperation.

Return the survey and school supplement(s) in the enclosed envelope to:

California Charter School Project
SRI International
333 Ravenswood Avenue, BS-125
Menlo Park, CA 94025

REMEMBER:
Please enclose a copy of each charter school's SARC with the completed survey.

Appendix C

INTERVIEW STUDY PROTOCOLS

Sponsoring District Interview Protocol

I. District context

- How would you describe the current reform orientation of this district? (Probes: standards-based reform, school-based management, integration of curriculum)
- Are there opportunities for school choice for the families and students in this district? (Probes: open-enrollment, options for enrollment in alternative schools)
- What professional development opportunities are offered to teachers and other personnel in the district? Are charter school employees encouraged/allowed to participate in these offerings? (probes: individually-determined professional development versus centralized offerings --or a combination)
- During the 1996-97 school year, what percentage of the students in your district were eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program?
- Approximately what percentage of students in your district receive Title 1 services?

II. Charter-granting process

- What was the motivation for creating this charter school?
  - If there are other charter schools in your district, how do their motivations and philosophies differ from this one?
- What individual or group circulated and submitted the petition?
- What other groups supported the petition? Did any groups oppose it? (probes: examples of support or resistance from parents, teachers, bargaining units, school board, other members of the community)
- Did your district require any revisions to the original charter as a condition of approving it or enter into any "side agreements"/amendments since its approval? What areas did the revised provisions and/or side agreements cover? What was the rationale for these required revisions?
- If the charter has been renewed since its original approval, what factors were considered by the district during the charter renewal process?

III. Charter school and district finance

- How do you calculate the funds that are received by the charter school(s) in your district?
    - Is it funded (much) like any other school in the district (expenditure/allocation-based approach), or is it given an allocation based on ADA and a negotiated amount of categorical funding (revenue-based approach)?
    - What percentage of the funds leveraged by the charter school is retained by the district? Does the district charge a "blanket rate" for indirect costs? If so, what is it? What services are provided in exchange for the retained funds? (probe: facilities/overhead; business office support; supplies and materials)
- If this is a basic aid district, does the charter school receive a share of funds that are in excess of the revenue limit?
- Does your district have a written agreement (e.g., contract, MOU) with the charter school that covers financial matters? (If so, get a copy)
    - what topics are covered by this agreement? (Possibilities include: basis for calculating school's revenue, entitlement data recording and reporting (when, who, how), tons of reports, cash flow and funds transfer, fiscal oversight, audit, district-provided goods and services (terms and cost), categorical programs compliance and support)
- Are there revenue sources for the charter school which non-charter schools do not or cannot receive? Are there revenue sources for non-charter schools which the charter school does not or cannot receive?
- Does the district put any restrictions on the allocations to the charter school? Specifically, is the school allowed to use any year-end balance (i.e., surplus) in the following school year?
- What fiscal oversight does the district have over the charter school? (probes: fiscal reporting to district by charter school, fiscal authority/chain of command for charter school's budget)
- Did the district incur any costs during the start-up phase of the charter school? What other sources of funds were exploited for start-up costs?
- How does the charter school deal with capital expenses? (probe: charter school participation in non-district grant programs, district subsidy through facilities or cash transfers)

- Who is responsible for filing financial reports required by the state (e.g., J-200, J-380, J-50, interim financial reports)?

- How would you describe your relationship with the charter school regarding financial matters? (e.g., (un)satisfactory, collegial, tense) What, if anything, would you change about your financial relationship with the charter school? How would staff at the charter school answer this question? (probe: more district control, more charter school control, current versus desired distribution of fiscal responsibilities)

IV. Accountability

- How do you hold the charter school accountable?
  - Do you require any reports from the school? If so, what do these contain?
  - What student achievement data are reported to the district by the charter school? Did the charter school participate in the district assessment program?
  - How do you know if the charter school is meeting its objectives?

- Are the ways in which the charter school is held accountable different from how other schools in the district are held accountable?

- Do you compare student achievement in the charter school(s) in your district with student achievement in non-charter schools? If so, how? If so, how is the charter school performing relative to other schools? *(Get copies of any available data.)*

- If possible, we would like to look at the charter school's performance relative to another school in your district that serves that same grade levels (   ) and students with a similar poverty level (% free/reduced lunch). Could you identify such a school?

V. Charter school policies and practices

- Does the district have written charter school policies? *(Obtain a copy of these policies.)* How and by whom were these policies developed?

- What do you do about issues that are not addressed in these policies? (Probes: dispute resolution; charter approval, renewal, and revocation)

- Are there any issues that are currently being negotiated, discussed, or disputed? If so, what are they? (Probe for details)

- Are teachers at the charter school covered by the same contractual agreement as teachers in the noncharter schools in your district? If not, describe the difference between contractual arrangements in your school district's charter and non-charter schools.

(For the next two questions, use question F5 from the district survey as a guide. May want to reproduce responses if available.)

- Describe the district's involvement in the charter school's educational program. (Probes: control over curriculum; provision of support services, such as personnel, materials, technical assistance; student assessment policies)

- Describe the district's involvement in other charter school policies. (Probes: daily schedule requirements; school calendar; disciplinary policies; staff hiring, discipline, hiring; budgetary expenses; student admission policies) *nb: some of these may have been answered in earlier responses*

VI. Reflections

- Do you have any concerns in particular area(s) about the charter school in your district? If so, please explain what they are. (Probes: finances, accountability, collective bargaining, facilities, capital needs, instructional program, legal issues)

- In your opinion, what have been the benefits associated with being a charter school for the charter school in your district?

- In your opinion, what have been the challenges associated with being a charter school for the charter school in your district?

Documents to collect at the district:

- District policies on charter schools (may be divided into "Board Policies" and "Administrative Regulations;" we only want the ones that are specific to charter schools.)

- Financial MOU or agreement

- Financial reports submitted by the charter school to the district, if any.

- Student achievement/performance reports submitted by the charter school to the district.

Charter School Director Interview Protocol

I. Director's Background

- What was your last position before becoming a charter school director? What are your prior experiences as a school administrator?
- Do you have your administrative credential or another type of training?
- Were you involved in the founding of the charter school?
- What were your reasons for joining/creating the charter school?

II. Charter-granting process/School History

- *(If not answered above)* What was the motivation for creating this charter school?
- Who was involved in the charter development process (Probes: parents, unions, other community members, organizations)?
- Did you encounter community support, resistance, or indifference? Describe.
- Has this changed over time?
- Have you encountered teacher's union support or resistance?
- What is this school's reputation in the community?
- Who signed your school's original charter petition, was it 50% of teachers in a school or 10% of teachers in the district?
  - How many of the teachers who signed the charter school petition now teach at your school?
- Did you include policies in your proposal for resolving disputes between your school and your district or county sponsor? If yes, what policies?
- Did your sponsoring district require any revisions to the original charter as a condition of approving it or enter into any "side agreements"/amendments since its approval? What areas did the revised provisions and/or side agreements cover? What was the rationale for these required revisions?
- If the charter has been renewed since its original approval, what factors were considered by the district during the charter renewal process?

III. Educational Program

- What is your school's philosophy?
- Does the school have an academic focus or specialty and/or does it focus on a target population?
- Does your school use academic standards? If yes, can we have a copy?
- What kind of organizational strategies (e.g., block scheduling, year-round, cross-age) and/or instructional strategies (e.g., experiential learning) does your school use?
- Do you have a unique schedule or you do operate during the traditional hours of operation?
- What is your school's average class size?
- Does your school have stated school performance goals?
    - What are they?
    - Are they written into the school charter?
    - How do you measure them?
- In addition to the ways already mentioned, how does your school assess student progress? (Probe on ***extent*** of use of alternative assessments—school-wide?)
- ***Ask for and/or confirm achievement data***
- *(for conversion schools only)* Has your school's program changed in any way since it became a charter school? If so, describe how. Is your school's program significantly different from other schools' in the district? If so, in what ways? (Probe for innovation)
- Is this school different from what was proposed in the petition? If so, how?
- Is your school involved in other state and/or national reform efforts (e.g., SB 1274, Coalition of Essential Schools, etc.)
- Do you think that any particular features of your school have had a substantial impact on student learning? If yes, what are they and how do you know?

IV. Staff issues

- What kind of policies or procedures does your school have for staff hiring and firing, staff grievances, or other personnel matters?

- How many teachers have left your school since it opened/became a charter school? Since last year? What percentage does this represent? What were some of the reasons for teachers leaving?
- What types of professional development opportunities do you have for teachers? (May use last year's offerings if they are representative)
  - Who decides topics?
  - Who participates?
  - How are they provided (e.g., through the district)
- What staff evaluation or review process does your school have?
  - What measures do you take for teachers who have poor performance? For teachers who are doing an exemplary job?
  - How are salaries determined? Connection to evaluation process (i.e., merit pay)?
- Are teacher/administrator relationships different in this school than in other schools in this district? If so, how?
  - Are teacher roles and responsibilities in this school different? If so, how?
  - Do any differences have an impact on the education students receive (*probe for specific examples*)?

V. Students

- If your school serves students with special needs (i.e., special education, LEP, low achieving, gifted), how does it do so? (Probes: with district staff/technical assistance, contracting services independently, school staff)
  - How does your school identify low-achieving students? What does it do to serve these students? Are any of the things your school does made possible because the school is a charter school/related to the school being a charter school?
- Have students left your charter school? If so, how many and for what reasons?
- How well are students performing at this school?
  - In what areas are you pleased with the level of progress/performance?
  - Where do you see a need for continued improvement (include special populations as well as skill areas)?

- What do you think are the main reasons students and parents choose your charter school?

- How many students are your waiting list (if there is one)? How are students chosen from the list?

VI. School Governance and Autonomy

- How is your school governed? (Probe: governing bodies, membership, how selected)

- Does your school involve parents and community members in school governance? If so, how?

- How would you characterize the impact/significance that the flexibility and autonomy that you have because you are a charter school has on your school?
  Probes: your ability to...
  - deliver your instructional program
  - involve parents in their children's education
  - perform administrative functions
  - involve teachers in planning and governance
  - purchase goods and services
  - other?

- How important is your autonomy from district management, the Education Code, and collective bargaining, respectively, on your ability to do the above things?

- Would you like more or less flexibility and autonomy in any area?

- Do any federal or state regulations interfere with operation of your school?

- What is the legal status of your school? Is it a non-profit organization? Is it legally independent? What are the implications of this status?

- Are there ways that the California charter legislation could be improved to better serve school's needs? If so, what are the revisions that would be necessary?

VII. Fiscal practices/Finance

(see attached Finance-Related Questions)

VIII. Accountability

- How is your school held accountable?

  - Do you provide your district with an annual report? If so, what does this contain?
  - In your opinion, are the requirements reasonable?
- Are the ways in which your school is held accountable different from how other schools in the district are held accountable?
- How do you and the district know if your school is meeting its objectives? How do you demonstrate your school's accomplishments?

IX. External Relationships/Community and Parent Involvement

- What kind of relationship does your school have with non-charter schools in the district?
- Do you communicate with other charter schools? Describe.
- How involved are parents and in what ways? What services do you offer to parents? (Probes: drop-in center, lounge, outreach)
- **Who are the parents that we are interviewing today? Are they representative of the school's popoulation? (Probes: SES indicators, how long kids in the school)**
- How visible is your school in the community?
- Does your school have support from and/or partnerships with the business community? If so, describe.
- Has your school encountered political resistance of any kind?
- Overall, how would you characterize your school's relationship with the district?
- Do you communicate with charter people at the state level at all? If yes, about what?

X. Reflections

- What have been the primary benefits of being a charter school?
- What have been the primary challenges of being a charter school?
- Have there been any unexpected outcomes as a result of being a charter school?

nb: ask director to identify candidate for comparison school—same grade level and similar poverty level. Also ask for or confirm achievement data.

Charter School Teacher Interview Protocol

I. Background

- What grade levels and subjects do you currently teach?
- What teaching experience did you have prior to joining the charter school? What was your last position prior to joining this school?
- How long have you been at this school?
- For what reason(s) did you join this charter school? We you involved in starting the charter? If so, what was the union's involvement in this process?

II. Educational Program/Assessment

- What is your school's philosophy?
- How is your school's educational program different from that of other schools in which you've taught (or "your knowledge of other schools" for new teachers)?
- To what extent does your school use particular organizational strategies (e.g., block scheduling) or instructional strategies (e.g., experiential learning) to improve student learning?
- Are teachers involved in curriculum development? How many are involved? In what ways?
- Does your school have stated, grade-to-grade standards for students?
  - What is an example of these standards?
- To what extent is your school's assessment system linked to the curriculum?
- Are there barriers to implementing your school's assessment system?

III. Staff Issues

- What kind of roles do teachers have in your school (including leadership roles)?
- Are there different roles for certificated or noncertificated teaching staff?
- How is time organized for teachers? (Probes: planning time, periods taught/day)

- How would you describe the role that you, as a teacher, play in your students' success? How would you characterize the attitudes/opinions of other teachers at this school? In your experience, are these attitudes different from other (noncharter) schools that you have worked in?

- How does the teacher salary and benefit structure (e.g. starting salary, pay increases, health insurance) compare to other schools in your district?

- What kind of process did you go through when you were hired?

- What kind of staff evaluation/review process does your school have?

  - What measures are taken for teachers who have poor performance? For teachers who are doing an exemplary job?

  - Are salaries impacted by the evaluation process?

  - How does this school's process compare to other schools you have worked in?

  - How do teachers at this school feel about this process (Probe for staff morale)

- Is there a lot of staff turnover or is your teaching staff stable?

  - If there is turnover, why do teachers usually leave?

- What kind of professional development opportunities do you have?

  - Who participates?
  - Who determines?
  - How many days?

IV. Students and Student Performance

- How does your school serve students with special needs (i.e., special education, LEP, low achieving, gifted)? (Probes: interventions, teaching strategies) How are these students identified? How are these methods impacted by the fact that this is a charter school?

- How do you assess student performance? How do you assess students beyond the school requirements? How are these methods impacted by the fact that this is a charter school?

- Do you think the charter school has had an impact on the performance of the students you serve? If so, describe the impact.

  - In what areas are you pleased with the level of progress/performance?

- Where do you sees a need for continued improvement (include special populations as well as skill areas)?

V. Parent and Community Involvement

- How would you characterize the level of parent involvement at this school? How does it compare to other schools in which you have taught?
- Have parents been involved in any of your classes? How many? How often? In what ways?

VI. Other

- What have been the primary benefits of being a charter school for you as a teacher? For the students? Does the amount of autonomy your school has impact your teaching?
- What have been the primary challenges of being a charter school?
- Have there been any unexpected outcomes as a result of being a charter school?
- How satisfied are you with your school's philosophy, the educational program, the school staff, and the governance structure?
- What kind of relationship does your school have with other charter schools?
- What kind of relationship does your school have with non-charter schools?
- Do you know of ways in which the state legislation could be changed to better serve your school's needs?

Finance-Related Questions

(attach to Director protocol)

I. Funding Sources and Levels

How is your charter school funded?

  - Is it funded (much) like any other school in the district (expenditure/allocation-based approach), or is it given an allocation based on ADA and a negotiated amount of categorical funding (revenue-based approach)?
  - What percentage of the funds leveraged by the charter school is retained by the district? Does the district charge a blanket rate for indirect costs? If so, what is it? What services are provided in exchange for the retained funds? (probe: facilities/overhead; business office support; supplies and materials)
  - If your school is sponsored by a basic aid district, does your school receive a share of funds that are in excess of the revenue limit?

- Has being a charter school influenced/changed the way your school allocates funds? Receives or purchases services?
  - How much of a hands-on/hands-off approach to budgeting does your school take?
  - Do you closely examine the appropriateness of district spending patterns and policies for your charter school?
  - *(expenditure-based schools only)* Does your school "cash out" of specific services (i.e., receive a pro-rata share of funds in place of specific services)?
  - *(expenditure-based schools only)* Does your school allocate any funds differently than the district calls for (e.g., using staffing allocations for other things)? Is there district resistance to this practice?
- Do you believe that funds at this school are more effectively spent because it is a charter school? Compared to noncharters in this district?
- How is your school affected by having its funds flow through the district instead of coming directly from the state? (Probes: problems, benefits, desire to change policy)
- Does your district have a written agreement (e.g., contract, MOU) with the charter school that covers financial matters? *(If so, get a copy)*
  - what topics are covered by this agreement? (Possibilities include: basis for calculating school's revenue, entitlement data recording and reporting (when, who, how), tons of reports, cash flow and funds transfer, fiscal oversight, audit, district-

provided goods and services (terms and cost), categorical programs compliance and support)

- Does the district put any restrictions on the allocations to your school? Specifically, is your school allowed to use any year-end balance (i.e., surplus) in the following school year?

- *(For all schools)* What services and goods does your school receive from the district? What is the rationale for receiving them from the district as opposed to other sources? (Probes: special education and other special populations, payroll, banking, accounting)

Categorical funding:

- What arrangements has your school made for special education?
  - Does your school receive a pro rata share of special education funding (federal, state, and local)?
  - Does the district or SELPA (Special Education Local Plan Areas) provide some or all services? (DIS, RSP, SDC, State Special Schools, Nonpublic Schools)[1]?

- How are services funded for special education students from outside of the sponsoring district or SELPA boundaries?

- What other categorical funding does the school receive?

II. Financial Management

- Who is responsible for fiscal matters in your school? Is this person adequately supported and qualified for the job?
  - Who is responsible for filing the reports required by the state (e.g., J-200, J-380, J-50, interim financial reports)?

- Is this school held accountable by the district for financial matters? What reports, if any, are required?

III. Cash Flow/Solvency

- Was a lack of start-up funds a problem for your school? If so, how did you surmount this problem? Did the district provide a cash advance based on ADA estimates?

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[1] DIS: Designated Instructional Services, RSP: Resource Specialist Program, SDC: Special Day Classes. DIS and RSP are often provided at a "regular" school site, including many charter schools.

- Has your school experienced cash flow problems? Similar to those experienced by most public schools every year?[2] If not, why not? If so, how do you deal with them?
- How does your school finance capital expenses?

IV. Issues and Concerns

- How would you describe your relationship with the district regarding financial matters (e.g. (un)satisfactory, collegial, tense)?
- Are there any specific issues that are of concern to your school (e.g. level of autonomy, strings attached to state or federal funding, "creeping takeover" of budget by the district)?

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[2] Many public schools have cash flow problems because of the uneven distribution of funds from the state throughout the year (the bulk of the money comes in December and April). Many schools meet their cash flow needs during the first several months of the school year by issuing short-term debt (e.g., TRANS). It is possible that some charter schools piggy-back onto the district's short-term borrowing.

Parent Interview Protocol

Ask for a range of parents who are representative of the school's population.

nb: focus group will be conducted early in the year. We will want to ask parents about their school involvement last year—sample should only include parents whose students attended the school 1996-97.

I. Background

- How many children did you have attending this school last year? What grade(s)? Did they attend public or private school before attending this school?

II. School Selection

- How did you first find out about this charter school (e.g., friend, advertisement)?
- Why did you decide to enroll your child/children in this school? What features of the charter school attracted you to it—the philosophy, staff, curriculum and instructional program, size, location, individual attention by teachers, academic standards, views on parent involvement?

III. Parent Satisfaction

- Overall, how satisfied are you with this school? Are there specific features that stand out as being satisfying?

  Probes:

  - school philosophy
  - curriculum and instructional program
  - the staff and quality of teaching
  - individual attention by teachers
  - academic standards for students
  - school resources (e.g., technology, facilities)
  - school size/class size
  - transportation to/from school
  - extracurricular activities and sports programs

- Compared to the school that your child would otherwise be attending this year, how would you rate this school (better, about the same, worse)? Why (be as specific as possible)?

- How do you feel about your child's academic progress at this school? Have you noticed any changes since he/she first came to this school?

- In your opinion, in what areas has the school been most successful?

- In what areas is there room for improvement? Why?

- What do you think are the biggest challenges the school and parents are facing in providing a quality education to students here?

IV. Parent Involvement

- Did you sign a parent-school contract or compact upon enrolling your child in this school?
    - What does the contract entail (e.g., agreement to participate in a minimum number of hours, activities)?
    - What are views about this contract (e.g., overly restrictive, reasonable)? Has it changed the way you interact with the school and your child?

- Does this school make you feel welcome and encourage you to participate in its operations? If so, how? (probes: is there a parent lounge or drop-in center ? how often are meetings? is there an outreach worker or staff person assigned to work on parent involvement? do teachers send home suggestions on how to help students with homework or information explaining lessons or homework?)

- Have you been involved in the governance or decision-making of this school? If so, how did you become involved? In what ways are you involved? How often are you involved?

- How do the opportunities to participate in governance here at this school compare to the opportunities provided at your child's previous school?

- Has this school offered any outreach or educational services (home visits, parenting workshops, ESL classes)? What is your opinion of these services? Were they helpful?

- In what other ways have you been involved with this school? (e.g., classroom volunteer, fundraising, helping on the playground, attending meetings)

- Does the school record and recognize your participation? If so, how (e.g., logs)?

- How does your level of involvement with this school compare to your involvement with your child's previous school?

Study of Charter School Effectiveness
State Interview Topic Guide

- Professional background of respondent and experience in education and education policymaking

- Who are the current stakeholders/players in state charter school politics? (probes: Groups that take positions on lots of pending charter school bills, individual legislators.)

- What are the "big issues/hot buttons" related to charter schools? (examples: Signature provision on charter petitions, 100 school cap (and status of pending legislation), the Field Act)

- What type of accountability are you seeking from charter schools? In what way might this form of accountability (or demands for charter school accountability generally) affect non-charter schools? (probe: A charter schools affecting the way non-charter schools do business?)

- Current status of cap on number of charter schools (probe: status of pending legislation)

- Will charter schools be required to participate in the future state testing program under any, all, or none of the proposals currently being discussed?

- What is your opinion about allowing entities other than school districts and county offices of education (like colleges and universities) to sponsor charters? What about groups other than teachers (e.g., parents) being able to petition for a charter school?

- Charter school personnel issues: use of non-credentialed instructional personnel

- What are school districts saying about charter schools and charter school sponsorship? What changes do you think school district personnel and/or school boards would advocate making to state guidelines for charter schools?

- Guidance provided to charter schools directly by the state, if any (probes: legislative requirements vs. reality; special education law, accountability requirements, changes to charter school programs after charters are approved).

- What type of regulatory guidance is provided to charter petitioners that are appealing a negative school board decision? Does the state (CDE or the state board of education) arbitrate this process in any way?

- Procedures for resolving conflicts: Do conflicts between charter schools and sponsoring entities ever come to the state for arbitration? What do schools do before (or instead of) coming to the state?

Funding Issues

- Status of pilot program for direct state funding to seven (7) charter schools. Other issues related to pros and cons of direct funding.

- Charters with job training components for adults: eligibility for ADA funding

Legislative Proposals Affecting Charter Schools

- What is your opinion about legal independence for charter schools? (probe: should legal independence be included in revised charter school legislation? What about the legal definition of charter schools and charter school--vs. district--liability?)

- What is your opinion about the duration of charters? (probe: SB221 proposes increasing the period for which charters are granted from 5 years to 15 years)

Charter School Districts

- Charter districts: What does it mean for the California Department of Education to be a sponsoring agency for charter school districts? (n=2) Has it been problematic for charter districts to accept students outside the historical district boundaries?

- Do charter districts (because CDE is the sponsoring agency) receive guidance and assistance that other schools do not?

Union/Collective Bargaining Issues

- What was the basis of the California Teacher's Association's opposition to the original charter legislation?

Appendix D

SUPPLEMENTAL WITHIN-DISTRICT COMPARISON DATA

Supplemental Within-District Comparison Data

The following data supplement the within-district comparisons of student ethnicity and LEP enrollment in charter and noncharter schools presented in Chapter II. As Table D-1[1] illustrates, 96% of the charter schools were within 10 percentage of points of the noncharter schools in their sponsoring districts with regard to the percentage of American Indian students. Similarly, the majority of schools were within 10 percentage points with regard to the percentages of Asian/Pacific Islander and African-American students.

There was greater variation, however, with regard to Hispanic and White student comparisons. Only 51% of charter schools were within 10 percentage points of the noncharter schools' Hispanic student enrollment. In 18% of schools, the percentage of Hispanic students was *less* than that in the noncharter schools by more than 25 percentage points. Similarly, only 49% of charter schools were within 10 percentage points of the noncharter schools' White student enrollment. In 19% of the charter schools, White students exceeded the noncharter district percentage by more than 25 points.

Table D-1

COMPARISON OF STUDENT ETHNICITIES IN CHARTER SCHOOLS AND NONCHARTER SCHOOLS IN THEIR SPONSORING DISTRICTS

	Percentage of Charter Schools (n=80)				
Percentage point difference between % students in charter school and % in district noncharter schools	**American Indian**	**Asian/ Pacific Islander**	**African American/ Black**	**Hispanic**	**White**
<-25	0%	0%	2.5%	17.5%	2.5%
-25 to -10.01	1.3%	7.5%	5%	18.8%	10%
-10 to 0	52.5%	60%	52.5%	38.8%	21.3%
.01 to 10	43.8%	27.5%	28.8%	12.5%	27.5%
10.01 to 25	0%	3.8%	6.3%	6.3%	20%
>25	2.5%	1.3%	5%	6.3%	18.8%

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[1] Only district-sponsored charter schools were included in the analysis. Charter school and district data come from CBEDS 1996-97 (noncharter district totals were calculated by first removing all charter school students from the district population).

Table D-2[2] shows that 67% of charter schools were within 20 percentage points of the noncharter schools in their sponsoring district with regard to the percentage of LEP students. In 24% of the charter schools, however, the percentage of LEP students was over 20 percentage points *less* than the total percentage for noncharter students in the sponsoring district.

Table D-2

COMPARISON OF STUDENT LEP POPULATIONS IN CHARTER SCHOOLS AND NONCHARTER SCHOOLS IN THEIR SPONSORING DISTRICTS

Percentage point difference between % LEP in charter school and total % LEP in district noncharter schools	**Percentage of Charter Schools** (n=70)
<-20	24.3%
-20 to 0	51.4%
.01 to 20	15.7%
>20	8.6%

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[2] Only district-sponsored charter schools were included in the analysis. District data came from the 1996-97 Language Census database, and totals were calculated by first removing all charter school students from the district population. Charter school data are from the telephone survey, item C7. The Language Census database did not include enough data from charter schools to use for this analysis.

Appendix E

CHARTER SCHOOL LAW

CALIFORNIA CODES

Eduction Code

Section 47600-47625

47600. This part shall be known, and may be cited, as the "Charter Schools Act of 1992."

47601. It is the intent of the Legislature, in enacting this part, to provide opportunities for teachers, parents, pupils, and community members to establish and maintain schools that operate independently from the existing school district structure, as a method to accomplish all of the following:

(a) Improve pupil learning.

(b) Increase learning opportunities for all pupils, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for pupils who are identified as academically low achieving.

(c) Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods.

(d) Create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site.

(e) Provide parents and pupils with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system.

(f) Hold the schools established under this part accountable for meeting measurable pupil outcomes, and provide the schools with a method to change from rule-based to performance-based accountability systems.

47602. (a) Except as provided in subdivision (b), the total number of charter schools operating in this state in any school year shall not exceed 100, with not more than 10 charter schools in any single school district. For the purposes of implementing this section, the State Board of Education shall assign a number to each charter notice it receives pursuant to subdivision (I) of Section 47605, based on the chronological order in which the notice is received.

(b) In addition to the total number of charter schools that school districts may operate in this state pursuant to subdivision (a) and the 10 charter schools that a single school district may operate pursuant to subdivision (a), a school district that maintains an enrollment of more than 600,000 pupils in the current school year may operate 12 charter schools for a maximum of 22 charter schools in these types of school districts.

(c) No charter shall be granted under this part that authorizes the conversion of any private school to a charter school.

47603. This part shall not be construed to prohibit any private person or organization from providing funding or other assistance to the establishment or operation of a charter school.

47605. (a) A petition for the establishment of a charter school within any school district may be circulated by any one or more persons seeking to establish the charter school. After the petition has been signed by not less than 10 percent of the teachers currently employed by the school district, or by not less than 50 percent of the teachers currently employed at one school of the district, it may be submitted to the governing board of the school district for review.

(b) No later than 30 days after receiving a petition, in accordance with subdivision (a), the governing board of the school district shall hold a public hearing on the provisions of the charter, at which time the board shall consider the level of employee and parental support for the petition. Following review of the petition and the public hearing, the governing board shall either grant or deny the charter within 60 days of receipt of the petition, provided, however, that the date may be extended by an additional 30 days if both parties agree to the extension. A school district governing board may grant a charter for the operation of a school under this part if it determines that the petition contains the number of signatures required by subdivision (a), a statement of each of the conditions described in subdivision (d), and descriptions of all of the following:

(1) A description of the educational program of the school, designed, among other things, to identify those whom the school is attempting to educate, what it means to be an "educated person" in the 21st century, and how learning best occurs. The goals identified in that program shall include the objective of enabling pupils to become self-motivated, competent, and lifelong learners.

(2) The measurable pupil outcomes identified for use by the charter school. "Pupil outcomes," for purposes of this part, means the extent to which all pupils of the school demonstrate that they have attained the skills, knowledge, and attitudes specified as goals in the school's educational program.

(3) The method by which pupil progress in meeting those pupil outcomes is to be measured.

(4) The governance structure of the school, including, but not limited to, the process to be followed by the school to ensure parental involvement.

(5) The qualifications to be met by individuals to be employed by the school.

(6) The procedures that the school will follow to ensure the health and safety of pupils and staff. These procedures shall include the requirement that each employee of the school furnish the school with a criminal record summary as described in Section 44237.

(7) The means by which the school will achieve a racial and ethnic balance among its pupils that is reflective of the general population residing within the territorial jurisdiction of the school district to which the charter petition is submitted.

(8) Admission requirements, if applicable.

(9) The manner in which an annual audit of the financial and programmatic operations of the school is to be conducted.

(10) The procedures by which pupils can be suspended or expelled.

(11) The manner by which staff members of the charter schools will be covered by the State Teachers' Retirement System, the Public Employees' Retirement System, or federal social security.

(12) The public school attendance alternatives for pupils residing within the school district who choose not to attend charter schools.

(13) A description of the rights of any employee of the school district upon leaving the employment of the school district to work in a charter school, and of any rights of return to the school district after employment at a charter school.

(14) The procedures to be followed by the charter school and the entity granting the charter to resolve disputes relating to provisions of the charter.

(c) Charter schools shall meet the statewide performance standards and conduct the pupil assessments required pursuant to Section 60605.

(d) In addition to any other requirement imposed under this part, a charter school shall be nonsectarian in its programs, admission policies, employment practices, and all other operations, shall not charge tuition, and shall not discriminate against any pupil on the basis of ethnicity, national origin, gender, or disability. Admission to a charter school shall not be determined according to the place of residence of the pupil, or of his or her parent or guardian, within this state, except that any existing public school converting partially or entirely to a charter school under this part shall adopt and maintain a policy giving admission preference to pupils who reside within the former attendance area of that public school.

(e) No governing board of a school district shall require any employee of the school district to be employed in a charter school.

(f) No governing board of a school district shall require any pupil enrolled in the school district to attend a charter school.

(g) The governing board may require that the petitioner or petitioners provide information regarding the proposed operation and potential effects of the school, including, but not limited to, the facilities to be utilized by the school, the manner in which administrative services of the school are to be provided, and potential civil liability effects upon the school and upon the school district.

(h) In reviewing petitions for the establishment of charter schools within the school district, the school district governing board shall give preference to petitions that demonstrate the capability to provide comprehensive learning experiences to pupils identified by the petitioner or petitioners as academically low achieving pursuant to the standards established by the State Department of Education under Section 54032.

(i) Upon the approval of the petition by the governing board of the school district, the petitioner or petitioners shall provide written notice of that approval, including a copy of the petition, to the State Board of Education.

(j) (1) If the governing board of the school district denies a charter, the county superintendent of schools, at the request of the petitioner or petitioners, shall select and convene a review panel to review the action of the governing board. The review panel shall consist of three governing board members from other school districts in the county and three teachers from other school districts in the county unless only one school district is located in the county, in which case the panel members shall be selected from school districts in adjoining counties.

(2) If the review panel determines that the governing board failed to appropriately consider the charter request, or acted in an arbitrary manner in denying the request, the review panel shall request the governing board to reconsider the charter request. In the case of a tie vote of the panel, the county superintendent of schools shall vote to break the tie.

(3) If, upon reconsideration, the governing board denies a charter, the county board of education, at the request of the petitioner or petitioners, shall hold a public hearing in the manner described in subdivision (b) and, accordingly, may grant a charter. A charter school for which a charter is granted by a county board of education pursuant to this paragraph shall qualify fully as a charter school for all funding and other purposes of this part.

47606. (a) A school district may convert all of its schools to charter schools under this part only if it meets all of the following conditions:

(1) Fifty percent of the teachers within the school district sign the charter petition.

(2) The charter petition contains all of the requirements set forth in subdivisions (b), (c), (d), (e), and (f) of Section 47605 and a provision that specifies alternative public school attendance arrangements for pupils residing within the school district who choose not to attend charter schools.

(b) Notwithstanding subdivision (b) of Section 47605, the districtwide charter petition shall be approved only by joint action of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education.

47607. (a) A charter may be granted pursuant to Sections 47605 and 47606 for a period not to exceed five years. A charter granted by a school district governing board or county board of education may be granted one or more subsequent renewals by that entity. Each renewal shall be for a period not to exceed five years. A material revision of the provisions of a charter petition may be made only with the approval of the authority that granted the charter.

(b) A charter may be revoked by the authority that granted the charter under this chapter if the authority finds that the charter school did any of the following:

(1) Committed a material violation of any of the conditions, standards, or procedures set forth in the charter petition.

(2) Failed to meet or pursue any of the pupil outcomes identified in the charter petition.

(3) Failed to meet generally accepted accounting standards of fiscal management.

(4) Violated any provision of law.

47608. All meetings of the governing board of the school district, the review panel convened pursuant to subdivision (j) of Section 47605, and the county board of education at which the granting, revocation, appeal, or renewal of a charter petition is discussed shall comply with the Ralph M. Brown Act (Chapter 9 (commencing with Section 54590) of Division 2 of Title 5 of the Government Code).

47610. A charter school shall comply with all of the provisions set forth in its charter petition, but is otherwise exempt from the laws governing school districts except as specified in Sections 47611 and 41365.

47611. If a charter school chooses to participate in the State Teacher's Retirement System, all employees of the charter school who qualify for membership in the system shall be covered under the system, and all provisions of Part 13 (commencing with Section 22000) and Part 14 (commencing with Section 26000) shall apply in the same manner as if the charter school were a public school in the school district that granted the charter.

47612. (a) The Superintendent of Public Instruction shall make all of the following apportionments to each charter school for each fiscal year:

(1) From funds appropriated to Section A of the State School Fund for apportionment for that fiscal year pursuant to Article 2 (commencing with Section 42238) of Chapter 7 of Part 24, an amount for each unit of regular average daily attendance in the charter school that is equal to the current fiscal year base revenue limit for the school district to which the charter petition was submitted.

(2) For each pupil enrolled in the charter school who is entitled to special education services, the state and federal funds for special education services for that pupil that would have been apportioned for that pupil to the school district to which the charter petition was submitted.

(3) Funds for the programs described in clause (I) of subparagraph (B) of paragraph (1) of subdivision (a) of Section 54761, and Sections 63000 and 64000, to the extent that any pupil enrolled in the charter school is eligible to participate.

(b) A charter school shall be deemed to be under the exclusive control of the officers of the public schools for purposes of Section 8 of Article IX of the California Constitution, with regard to the appropriation of public moneys to be apportioned to any charter school, including, but not limited to, appropriations made for the purposes of subdivisions (a) and (b).

(c) A charter school shall be deemed to be a "school district" for purposes of Section 41302.5 and Sections 8 and 8.5 of Article XVI of the California Constitution.

47613. Notwithstanding subdivision (c) of Section 48209.11, with respect to any pupil of a charter school located within a basic aid school district of choice who attended a public school in a district other than a basic aid district immediately before transferring to the charter school, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, commencing with the 1996-97 fiscal year, shall calculate for that school an apportionment of state funds that provides 70 percent of the district revenue limit calculated pursuant to Section 42238 that would have been apportioned to the school district of residence for any average daily attendance credited pursuant to Section 48209.11. For purposes of this section, "basic aid district" means a school district that does not receive from the state, for any fiscal year in which the subdivision is applied, an apportionment of state funds pursuant to subdivision (h) of Section 42238.

47616. The State Department of Education shall review the educational effectiveness of the charter school approach authorized under this part and, not later than January 1, 1999, shall report to the Legislature accordingly with recommendations to modify, expand, or terminate that approach.

47616.5. The Legislative Analyst shall contract for an interim evaluation of the effectiveness of the charter school approach authorized under this part and, on or before November 1, 1997, shall report to the Legislature and the Governor accordingly with recommendations to modify, expand, or terminate that approach. The evaluation of the effectiveness of the charter school approach shall include, but shall not be limited to, the following factors:

(a) If available, the pre- and post-charter school test scores of pupils attending charter schools and other pupil assessment tools.

(b) The level of parental satisfaction with the charter school approach compared with schools within the district in which the charter school is located.

(c) The impact of required parental involvement.

(d) The fiscal structures and practices of charter schools as well as the relationship of these structures and practices to school districts, including the amount of revenue received from various public and private sources.

(e) An assessment of whether or not the charter school approach has resulted in increased innovation and creativity.

(f) Opportunities for teachers under the charter school approach.

(g) Whether or not there is an increased focus on low-achieving and gifted pupils.

(h) Any discrimination and segregation in charter schools.

(i) If available, the number of charter school petitions submitted to governing boards of school districts and the number of those proposals that are denied, per year, since the enactment of the charter school law, including the reasons why the governing boards denied these petitions, and the reasons governing boards have revoked charters.

(j) The governance, fiscal liability and accountability practices and related issues between charter schools and the governing boards of the school districts approving their charters.

(k) The manner in which governing boards of school districts monitor the compliance of the conditions, standards, and procedures entered into under a charter.

(l) The extent of the employment of noncredentialed personnel in charter schools.

(m) An assessment of how the exemption from laws governing school districts allows charter schools to operate differently than schools operating under those laws.

(n) A comparison in each school district that has a charter school of the pupil dropout rate in the charter schools and in the noncharter schools.

(o) The role and impact of collective bargaining on charter schools.

47620. An elementary school that has been operated by the University of California at the Los Angeles campus prior to January 1, 1994, may apply to become a charter school under this chapter. The school may apply under either Section 47621 or Section 47622. If a charter is granted under this chapter, the resulting charter school shall be part of the public school system.

47621. An elementary school that meets the requirements of Section 47620 may apply to become a charter school by petitioning the governing board of the local school district and otherwise following the procedures and requirements contained in Chapter 2 (commencing with Section 47605) and Chapter 3 (commencing with Section 47610).

47622. As an alternative to Section 47621, an elementary school that meets the requirements of Section 47620 may apply to become a charter school by petitioning the State Board of Education. Under this section, the petition shall be signed by not less than 50 percent of the school's currently employed teachers. All other procedures and requirements, other than those prescribed in subdivision (a) of Section 47605, that are contained in Chapter 2 (commencing with Section 47605) and Chapter 3 (commencing with Section 47610) are applicable to a petition filed pursuant to this section except that references to "governing board" shall mean the State Board of Education.

47623. If an elementary school petitions either the governing board of the local school district or the State Board of Education to become a charter school, as specified in Section 47621 or 47622, that school shall receive state apportionments equal to the statewide average revenue limit for elementary schools plus funding as specified in paragraphs (2) and (3) of subdivision (a) of Section 47612.

47624. If a charter is granted under this chapter, the University of California shall continue to own and be liable for the resulting charter school to the same extent as before the granting of the charter.

47625. A charter granted pursuant to Section 47620 shall not become operative before July 1, 1995.

Eduction Code

Section 41365

41365. (a) The Charter School Revolving Loan Fund is hereby created in the State Treasury. The Charter School Revolving Loan Fund shall be comprised of federal funds obtained by the State Department of Education for charter schools and any other funds appropriated or transferred to the fund. The amount in the Charter School Revolving Loan Fund is continuously appropriated for the purposes of the fund. From the federal Public Charter Schools Program grant funds awarded to the Department of Education for 1996-97 and appropriated in Item 6110-112-0890 of Section 2.00 of Chapter 162 of the Statutes of 1996, one hundred fourteen thousand dollars ($114,000) shall be deposited by the Superintendent of Public Instruction in the Charter School Revolving Loan Fund. Additional federal Public Charter Schools Program grant funds appropriated in Item 6110-112-0890 of Section 2.00 of Chapter 162 of the Statutes of 1996 may be transferred by the Superintendent of Public Instruction to the Charter School Revolving Loan Fund subject to approval by the Department of Finance.

(b) Loans may be made from moneys in the Charter School Revolving Loan Fund to school districts for charter schools that are not a conversion of an existing school upon application of a school district and approval by the Superintendent of Public Instruction. A loan is for use by the charter school during the period from the date the charter is granted pursuant to Section 47605 and the end of the fiscal year in which the charter school first enrolls pupils. Money loaned to a school district for charter school pursuant to this section shall be used only to meet the purposes of the charter granted pursuant to Section 47605. The loan to a school district for a charter school pursuant to this subdivision shall not exceed fifty thousand dollars ($50,000). This subdivision does not apply to a renewal of a charter pursuant to Section 47607.

(c) During each of the two successive fiscal years commencing with the first fiscal year following the fiscal year the charter school first enrolls pupils, the Controller shall deduct from apportionments made to the school district an amount equal to one-half of the amount loaned to the school district for the charter school under this section and pay the same amount into the Charter School Revolving Loan Fund in the State Treasury.

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Appendix F

CHARTER STUDY ADVISORY PANEL

CHARTER STUDY ADVISORY PANEL MEMBERS

The following individuals served on the Charter Study Advisory Panel assembled by the Legislative Analyst's Office. Panel members and the LAO provided feedback on the draft version of this report. However, the findings and recommendations presented in this report are solely the responsibility of SRI International, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of panel members or the LAO.

Vera Algoet
Linscott Charter School
Watsonville, CA

Vicki Barber
El Dorado County Office of Education
Placerville, CA

Caryn Becker
Department of Finance
Sacramento, CA

Tom Griffin
Sacramento City Unified School District Board
Sacramento, CA

Henry Hurley
San Diego City Unified School District
San Diego, CA

David Illig
California Research Bureau
Sacramento, CA

Mark Knapp
San Diego Teachers Association
San Diego, CA

Joe Lucente
Fenton Avenue Charter School
Lake View Terrace, CA

Dave Patterson
Department of Education
Sacramento, CA

Tom Ruiz
Bay Area School Reform Collaborative
San Francisco, CA

Ting Sun
Natomas Charter School
Sacramento, CA

Jill Wynns
San Francisco Unified School District Board
San Francisco, CA